

# Taking Inspiration from the Words of ‘Alī (‘a)

Sayyid Muḥammad Taqī Ḥakīm

Dar al-Zahra

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Arabic words have been transliterated according to the following standard transliteration table:

|   |    |   |                           |
|---|----|---|---------------------------|
| ء | ﺀ  | ط | ṭ                        |
| ا | a  | ظ | ẓ                         |
| ب | b  | ع | ʿ                         |
| ت | t  | غ | gh                        |
| ث | th | ف | f                         |
| ج | j  | ق | q                         |
| ح | ḥ  | ك | k                         |
| خ | kh | ل | l                         |
| د | d  | م | m                         |
| ذ | dh | ن | n                         |
| ر | r  | و | w                         |
| ز | z  | ي | y                         |
| س | s  | ه | h                         |
| ش | sh | ة | h (or not transliterated) |
| ص | ṣ  |   |                           |
| ض | ḍ  |   |                           |

### Long Vowels

|   |   |
|---|---|
| ا | ā |
| و | ū |
| ي | ī |

### Short Vowels

|    |   |
|----|---|
| ـَ | a |
| ـُ | u |
| ـِ | i |

(§) : ﷺ - Peace and blessings be upon him and his family

(a) : ﷺ - Peace be upon him

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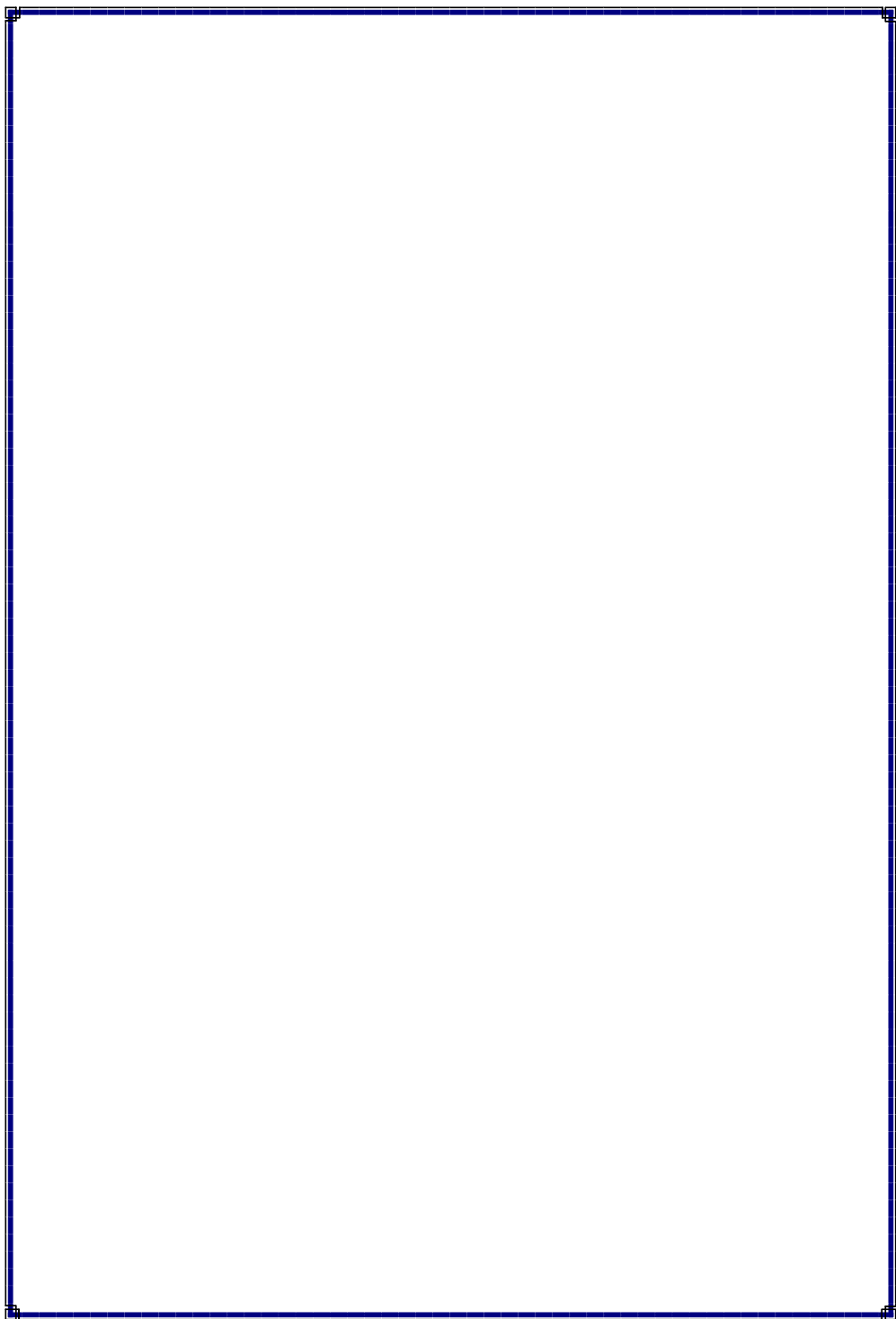
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## INTRODUCTION

This book is part of a series of works I have written on the commentary and exposition of a selection of sayings of the Prophet (ﷺ) and Imāms (‘a). In this book I have expounded on one hundred and ten sayings of Imām ‘Alī (‘a), which is the number derived from the *abjad* calculation of his name ‘Alī. The sayings pertain to ethical, cultural and social issues. I have included a translation and commentary for each saying so that, through the use of examples, the thoughts of that great man may be understood and the lofty instructions of that illustrious personality, which show us the right way of living our lives, may be followed. Indeed, he was a leader who would never lead his followers to destruction and would always guide them to the path of security and salvation.

As the respected reader is aware, the *Nahj al-Balāgha* has been divided into three sections. The first consists of sermons, the second, letters and the third is comprised of sayings and aphorisms of Imām ‘Alī (‘a). All these sermons, letters and sayings have been numbered and there is a slight variance in the numbering between the different manuscripts of the *Nahj al-Balāgha*. The sayings are mostly said to number 480, but in the *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha* of Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, that has been printed in Egypt, 485 sayings have been recorded.

In order to reassure the esteemed reader, we have selected sayings from the third part of the more authentic version of *Nahj al-Balāgha*, and in order to preserve the sacredness of the words, we have included the original Arabic along with the complete reference. The copy of *Nahj al-Balāgha* which we used was the one that was emended and arranged by Dr. Şubhî Şâlih and printed in Egypt originally, before being reprinted in Tehran.

This book was authored in October 1962, and has been reprinted several times. The first edition was printed by the author in 1968. The second edition was printed by a publication company in 1971. The third to fifth editions were subsequently printed between 1974 and 1979. The printing of the sixth and seventh editions was undertaken by the Islamic Publishing House (*Intishārāte Islāmī*) in 1982 and 1984 respectively. From the eight edition, I made some changes to the original work and the book you currently hold in your hands is the ninth edition.

Sayyid Muhammad Taqi Hakim

Autumn, 1988

## WHO WAS ‘ALĪ ?

Who was ‘Alī (‘a)? A man of medium height with a handsome and bright face, a wheatish complexion, arching eyebrows, a piercing gaze, silvern neck, thick beard, wide shoulders, strong bones, muscular forearms, a cheerful countenance, smiling lips and an appealing mien.<sup>1</sup> He was courageous but compassionate, of noble status but humble. He was a strong man, an unmatched fighter, an awe-inspiring personality, a God-fearing statesman, a defender of justice, forbearing and patient, known for his mercy, unrivalled in his wisdom, an exceptional sage, a fountainhead of grace, a source of knowledge, the founder of gnosis and the inspirer of cognizance.

He was the perfect ascetic, the best devotee, a devout worshipper, sincere in his prayers, a helper of the oppressed, a trustworthy judge, a great reformer, a just ruler, and a compassionate commander. He was an enemy to the oppressor and a friend to the oppressed. He was the first male to believe in the Prophet (ṣ), the foremost supporter of Islam, a man of great foresight, strong determination, unequalled compassion, unsurpassed munificence, and a generosity that was famous among all the people.<sup>2</sup>

He was an eloquent speaker and an articulate orator. His speech was unparalleled in its clarity, consistency and fluency. His

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<sup>1</sup> Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Mahajjat al-Bayḍā’*, vol. 4, p. 206-207

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 68 & 77

words were the pinnacle of all speech and the model for all other discourse, just as he was himself a leader of the people. According to both friend and foe, after the Glorious Qur'ān, his speech was matchless. His words were a curative remedy for ailments. His sermons, when compared to the orations of others, were like the full moon among the tiny stars. His phrases were, just like the Qur'ān, distinct and easily distinguishable from those of others.<sup>3</sup>

This is 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (‘a), the nobleman who lived a life of purity and died in the state of purity. 'Alī is a universe of virtues; 'Alī is a sea of excellent merits without a shore. Who can ever reach the depths of his qualities? Who can ever grasp the different aspects of his noble life? The more scholars and researchers strive to understand him, the more they find themselves incapable of studying his life as it ought to be studied and no matter how careful and precise the writers are, they are unable to portray all the dimensions of his life.

So 'Alī (‘a) is not someone who will be forgotten or whose rights will be adequately fulfilled. It is for this reason that, every now and then, we hear the news of another book or article that has been written, with a new point of view, on his life and times. Indeed, there are endless opinions and research, studies and analyses about this great man who truly sacrificed everything for the sake of God. A hero who was not ready to witness oppression even on a small ant

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<sup>3</sup> Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha*, vol. 3, p. 84-85

and who never consumed even a single morsel of that which was unlawful. One who always took time to care for the orphans and the poor, and who would spare no effort in assisting them and bringing joy to their lives. A man who did not differentiate between himself and the other Muslims when distributing shares from the public treasury, and who never failed to fulfil even the smallest rights.

He was an individual whose contrasting qualities have baffled others and whose noble characteristics have left everyone speechless. After all, he was the champion of humanity; rather it is he who has given honour and prestige to humanity.

His blessed name was ‘Alī, his epithet was Abū al-Ḥasan and his well-known titles were Amīr al-Mu’minīn and al-Murtaḍā.<sup>4</sup> He was born on Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> of Rajab, 30 years after the Year of the Elephant (‘Ām al-Fīl), in the Holy Ka’bah - and this is a feature that will always distinguish him from everyone else.<sup>5</sup> His father was Abū Ṭālib, the uncle of the Prophet (ṣ) who assisted and defended the Noble Prophet for as long as he was alive.<sup>6</sup>

His mother was Fāṭimah, the daughter of Asad ibn Hāshim ibn ‘Abd Manāf, and the Holy Prophet (ṣ) considered her to be like his mother and would always recall her affection towards him and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibn Aḥmad, *Manāqib al-Khwārizmī*, p. 6-8

<sup>5</sup> Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 3

<sup>6</sup> Shaykh ‘Abbās al-Qummī, *al-Kunā wal-Alqāb*, vol. 1, p. 110

was grateful for her kindness to him.<sup>7</sup> From a very young age, ‘Alī grew up in the lap of the Holy Prophet, and he was ten years old when he first accepted Islam.<sup>8</sup>

After the commencement of the prophetic mission, ‘Alī remained with the Prophet for thirteen years in Makkah and when the Prophet migrated to Madīnah, he joined him there and remained by his side for the next ten years.<sup>9</sup> After the Prophet passed away from this world, ‘Alī lived for another thirty years; two years and four months under the caliphate of Abū Bakr, ten years and eight months under the caliphate of ‘Umar and twelve years under the caliphate of ‘Uthmān. Then he became the caliph and his caliphate continued for about five years.<sup>10</sup>

When the Prophet migrated to Madīnah, ‘Alī slept on his bed putting his own life in danger so that the enemy would not know that the Prophet had left Makkah, thereby saving his life.<sup>11</sup> He participated in all the Prophet’s battles against the enemies, except the Battle of Tabūk where the Prophet asked him to remain behind in Madīnah as his representative.<sup>12</sup> In the battles of Badr, Uḥud, Khandaq, Khaybar, Ḥunayn and all the other battles, ‘Alī showed his

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 3

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha*, vol. 1, p. 14

<sup>9</sup> Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 3

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 92

<sup>11</sup> Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 22-23

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 71



valour and in many of them he was the decisive factor and was responsible for the victory of the Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

In the second year after the Hijra, he married Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Prophet (ṣ), and from this holy matrimony resulted four beautiful children: Imām al-Ḥasan, Imām al-Ḥusayn, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm.<sup>14</sup> In the year 10 A.H., when the Prophet was returning from his final Ḥajj, at a place known as Ghadīr Khum, he introduced ‘Alī to the people as his successor and proclaimed his superiority and excellence over all the Muslims.<sup>15</sup>

During his reign, ‘Alī (‘a) had to fight many of enemies and the following battles took place during his caliphate:

- a) The Battle of Jamal (the Camel): This battle resulted from the rebellion of Talḥa and Zubayr at the behest of ‘Ā’isha under the pretext of avenging the murder of ‘Uthmān. They had accused ‘Alī of being responsible for his death and decided to rebel against him, but ‘Alī (‘a) was victorious in this battle and afterwards, he moved his capital to Kūfā.
- b) The Battle of Ṣiffīn: In this battle ‘Alī’s opponent was Mu‘āwiyah, and when it became apparent that ‘Alī was on the verge of victory, he employed the cunning and trickery of ‘Amr ibn ‘Ās to take the matter to arbitration. Each party

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 25, 27

<sup>14</sup> Shaykh ‘Abbās al-Qummī, *al-Tanbīh wal-Ishrāf*, p. 202

<sup>15</sup> Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 82

chose a representative and in the end this sly man used his guile to turn things in favour of Mu'āwiyah.

- c) The Battle of Nahrawān: Those who rebelled against 'Alī in this battle were a group known as the *khawārij*. These were the people who were unhappy with the outcome of the Battle of Ṣiffīn. In this battle they were defeated and 'Alī was victorious.<sup>16</sup>

'Alī (ʿa) was martyred in the year 40 A.H. (661 C.E.) at the age of sixty-three. His killer was one of the *khawārij* by the name 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam. He was attacked by his assailant with a poisoned sword and struck while he was in prayer. He sustained a fatal injury which led to his death two days later. His body was buried in an uninhabited place known as al-Gharī (present-day Najaf). Today, his shrine in the centre of Najaf in Iraq, is visited regularly by his followers and all those who love and admire him.<sup>17</sup>

Life has many different challenges and man has to contend with different feelings and inclinations, all of which perplex him and leave him not knowing what to do. Should he obey his intellect or should he give in to his desires? An astounding struggle takes place and large tumultuous waves rock the boat of life from one side to the other. One needs a captain to be able to control this ship and steer it

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<sup>16</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 366, 418

<sup>17</sup> Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 5, 13

in the right direction. A guide is also necessary to help one differentiate the right path from the wrong ones.

How fortunate is the person who finds a guide who knows the right course and who turns to a skilful captain to help him arrive at the shore of salvation, saving him from the danger of frightening storms. Can there be any captain better than ‘Alī (‘a) and do you know of any guide better than this great personality?

## DIGNITY

Imām ‘Alī (‘a) has said:

مَاءٌ وَجْهَكَ جَامِدٌ يُقْطِرُهُ السُّؤَالُ فَأَنْظِرْ عِنْدَ مَنْ تُقْطِرُهُ

*Your dignity is like frozen water that is melted by asking, so consider whose  
presence you are melting it in!*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 346)*

Man possesses dignity and self-respect, and always works hard to preserve his respect and status in society. As long as he does not ask anyone for anything and does not extend his hand towards any person in humiliation, his dignity remains intact, and he can continue living with honour. However, when he makes a request, he belittles himself and gives up his dignity. Nevertheless, if the person he is entreating is noble and kind, he may accede to his request without telling anyone else about it. In this case, he will get what he needs and will have only belittled himself in front of one individual. Of course, belittling oneself in front of the noble is tolerable and not too difficult to bear. If, on the other hand, the person being entreated is ignoble and unkind, either he will not accede to his request or if he does, he will announce it in different gatherings with the aim of showing off, so in the end the person will either not get what he needs or will lose his dignity and reputation in the eyes of many.

## TESTING PEOPLE

فِي تَقَلُّبِ الْأَحْوَالِ عِلْمُ جَوَاهِرِ الرِّجَالِ

*In the alteration of states there is knowledge about the true nature of people  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 217)*

Question: How can we know the hidden intentions of people?  
Answer: From their steadfastness and determination or from their inappropriate behaviour and negligence. When can the steadfastness or negligence of a person become known? In normal circumstances? Or in situations where it is possible to make a decision and act upon one of two opposite choices, or to put it differently, when there is a possibility of harm? It is obvious that in normal circumstances, nothing holds human beings back, as there is nothing to expose their agreeable and conflicting beliefs, nor is there any action that would inform us about the creed and ideology that a person espouses. There is no moral conduct or behaviour that manifests their true qualities, virtues and vices. However, when the circumstances change, and there is upheaval in the social environment or in the personal lives of individuals, this is the best opportunity to gauge the nature of people, because it is during these turbulent times that their true character become known, their true identities are revealed and the veil that was concealing their true nature is removed.

## THE CREATION OF MAN

إِعْجَبُوا لِهَذَا الْإِنْسَانِ يَنْظُرُ بِشَحْمٍ وَيَتَكَلَّمُ بِلَحْمٍ وَيَسْمَعُ بِعَظْمٍ  
وَيَتَنَفَّسُ مِنْ خَرَمٍ

*How amazing this human being is! He sees through [a layer of] fat, speaks with a piece of flesh, hears with a bone and breathes through an orifice.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 8)*

The human being, what a wondrous creature! The masterpiece of God's creation! If a person were to observe the human being and think about the systematic functioning of his body, carefully studying the outward and inward aspects as much as is scientifically possible, and analysing the way and the specific order in which the workshop that is the human body functions, and if he were to ponder over the different materials and chemicals that have been used to produce the physical structure and form of the body that human beings use and derive benefit from, he will definitely become astounded and amazed, and will sink deep into a sea of wonder. He will be left with no way out but to accept that human beings are indeed marvellous creatures.

## SLOWLY BUT SURELY

قَلِيلٌ مَدُومٌ عَلَيْهِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ كَثِيرٍ مَمْلُولٍ مِنْهُ

*Little that is done with perseverance is better than a lot that one gets weary of [and abandons].*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 444)*

Sometimes a person thinks of an action that is praiseworthy and good and decides to always perform that action and make it part of his daily routine. However, because the action is difficult and challenging, he quickly becomes weary and is unable to continue doing it. In the end, he may turn away from the good action altogether and even start to despise it. On the other hand, if he were to take up some action that was lighter and easier to perform, such that he could continue it without becoming tired, it would be better. Because in this way, he would not fail to perform the good deed and may eventually be able to carry out even more virtuous acts.

It should be noted that this rational principle can be applied everywhere, even to acts of worship; despite the fact that more worship is generally encouraged.

## THE INSTRUMENT OF LEADERSHIP

### آلَةُ الرِّيَاسَةِ سَعَةُ الصَّدْرِ

*The instrument of leadership is [patience and] large-heartedness.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 176)*

The person who takes on a position of leadership and attains a place in the seat of power, gaining authority over a group of people, has taken on a heavy burden and a big responsibility. This is because leadership requires know-how and more importantly, great patience, in order to fulfil the responsibility adequately. A leader must firstly protect his position, meaning that he should be wary of the opposition and their plots to sabotage his work so that he can thwart their efforts. Secondly, he should fulfil his obligations to the best of his ability. Thirdly, he should attend to the needs and requirements of those who turn to him. Taking into consideration the available resources, he should try his best to assist them, and if he is unable to assist, he should politely explain this to them. Fourthly, he also needs to fulfil his personal responsibilities (towards his family for example). A person who lacks strength cannot do all these things and would quickly lose his temper or become fatigued, and in the end he would have no choice but to give up his post. However, a patient and forbearing individual is able to handle all these responsibilities without getting upset or losing his temper.



## LEARNING GOOD ETIQUETTE

كَفَّاكَ أَدْبًا لِتَفْسِكَ اجْتِنَابُ مَا تَكْرَهُهُ مِنْ غَيْرِكَ

*In order to discipline yourself, it is enough that you keep away from [doing]  
that which you hate from others.  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 412)*

It is human nature to feel inclined towards good and to loathe and despise evil. Furthermore, human beings also have the ability to differentiate between good and evil and most of the time they can tell the difference between a good deed and an evil act. A person may see someone do or say something that his conscience agrees with and thus he likes it. On the other hand he may witness people doing something that seems inappropriate and distasteful and as a result, it makes him cringe inside. So, keeping in mind that man has a propensity for good, and the yardstick for distinguishing good is in his possession, how nice it would be for him to emulate the good actions of others and eschew their evil deeds in order to improve his moral character.

Luqmān, the wise, was once asked, “From whom have you learnt good etiquette?” He replied, “From those who lack good etiquette. For whenever I saw anything they did which I disliked, I stayed away from it.”

## THE VALUE OF HUMAN BEINGS

قِيَمَةُ كُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا يُحْسِنُهُ

*The value of every person is [measured by] that which he does well.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 81)*

There are many amazing talents and abilities in every human being. If a person leaves these abilities unused and stagnant, he will have been unjust to himself and possibly to others as well. If, on the other hand, he develops his inner abilities and talents through appropriate training and perseverance, acquiring the required knowledge so that he can take advantage and make use of his natural skills to benefit himself and others, he will attain a lofty standing and a good reputation in this world. However, aside from this striving and attaining a high standing, how can we measure the extent of this individual's value and worth? The answer to this is related to the merit and excellence that is seen manifestly in his works and how much the people benefit from him, so that it can be known to what extent he has attained proficiency and expertise in his field, how useful it is, and how much the society can benefit from it. By taking all this into account, the value of a person can accurately be assessed.

## PRIDE AND ARROGANCE

ضَعْ فَخْرَكَ وَاحْطُظْ كِبْرَكَ وَادْكُرْ قَبْرَكَ

*Abandon your arrogance, put aside your pride and remember your grave.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 398)*

Man is an honourable being, and if he fulfils all his obligations, he is the most honourable of all beings. However, if he were to put aside his title, his status and his position in society for a moment, and look at his beginning and end, he would realise that he is nothing more than a tiny creature and despite his honourable position, he is very weak.

Therefore, in order not to lose his way and deviate from the path that he is meant to follow, it behoves him never to forget his beginning and his end and not to transgress his limits. If he fails to do this and instead remains proud and vain, then the imaginative power in man is vast and his delusions will know no bounds. As a result, he will make preposterous claims and embark on the path of conceit and arrogance. This is a wrong path that will most surely lead him to loss and injury and will undoubtedly take him to the brink of destruction and devastation.

## HOW THE MASSES THINK

مَنْ أَسْرَعَ إِلَى النَّاسِ بِمَا يَكْرَهُونَ قَالُوا فِيهِ بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

*Whoever hastens to the people with that which they dislike, they will speak about him that which they do not know.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 35)*

The status of people in every society differs. One may be high, the other low. One may be a leader and the other a subject. One an employer and the other, an employee. For each person who works in his own field and gains expertise, or takes office and is able to carry out important work, the people have high expectations that this individual will be able to fulfil their wishes and turn their hopes into reality, thereby securing for them a life of relative ease and comfort.

On the other hand there are things that, in the eyes of the people, are displeasing and disliked. When the people see these things happening, they get angry and begin to loathe the person who performs these actions and become outraged by him. They may even accuse him and spread rumours about him.

## PROCEED COURAGEOUSLY

إِذَا هِبْتَ أَمْرًا فَفَعَّ فِيهِ فَإِنَّ شِدَّةَ تَوَقُّيهِ أَعْظَمُ مِمَّا تَخَافُ مِنْهُ

*When you are frightened of something then enter into it, for indeed the difficulty of safeguarding yourself is greater than [facing] what you are afraid of.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 175)*

The apparently insurmountable nature of certain tasks can at times be frightening. The more a person thinks about them, the more he finds nothing but difficulty, and he gains nothing from this but the bitter reality of his own weakness. Sometimes people get so preoccupied by these kinds of tasks that they don't get anything accomplished and the only result is hopelessness. In such a case, what is a person's duty? Should he give up and abandon the task or should he continue struggling to get it done in whatever way possible? Scholars and experts have said that the only way for a person to succeed is by completing the peripheral and outlying aspects of the task well and then preparing to tackle the difficult task itself. Then, in one courageous leap and with a heart full of hope, one should embark on the task. If he does this, he will definitely succeed and that is when he will realise that with the right planning and attitude, the work is actually quite easy and there is nothing to be frightened or apprehensive about.

## CHOOSING FRIENDS

يَا بُنَيَّ إِيَّاكَ وَ مُصَادَقَةَ الْأَحْمَقِ فَإِنَّهُ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَنْفَعَكَ فَيُضِرَّكَ وَإِيَّاكَ وَ  
مُصَادَقَةَ الْبَخِيلِ فَإِنَّهُ يَقْعُدُ عَنْكَ أَحْوَجَ مَا تَكُونُ إِلَيْهِ وَإِيَّاكَ وَ  
مُصَادَقَةَ الْفَاجِرِ فَإِنَّهُ يَبِيعُكَ بِالثَّأْفَةِ وَإِيَّاكَ وَ مُصَادَقَةَ الْكَذَّابِ فَإِنَّهُ  
كَالسَّرَابِ يُقَرِّبُ عَلَيْكَ الْبَعِيدَ وَ يُبْعِدُ عَلَيْكَ الْقَرِيبَ

*O my son, be careful not to befriend a fool, for he will harm you while trying to benefit you; and be wary of befriending a miser, for he will hold back [from assisting you] when you are most in need of him; and do not to befriend a wicked person, for he will surely sell his friendship for the most worthless of things; and never befriend a liar, for he is like a mirage, bringing close to you that which is distant and taking far away from you that which is close.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 37)*

In the same way that a person spares no effort when searching for an appropriate spouse and carries out extensive investigation into their character, he should also be very careful when choosing friends and companions so that he may gain appropriate friends whom he can benefit from and by whose help he can achieve perfection. If he makes friends without the required precaution and investigation, befriending just anyone who comes along without due

consideration, not only will that friendship not increase his merit, it may also bring him great physical and spiritual harm. He may possibly also lose his good qualities and habits by befriending such unsuitable individuals.

## REVENGE VERSUS FORGIVENESS

إِذَا قَدَرْتَ عَلَىٰ عَدُوِّكَ فَاجْعَلِ الْعَفْوَ عَنْهُ شُكْرًا لِلْقُدْرَةِ عَلَيْهِ

*When you overpower your enemy, let your forgiveness towards him be the gratitude [you feel] for your having defeated him.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 11)*

When a person defeats his enemy and gains authority over him, what should he do? Should he exact revenge from his enemy or should he forgive him? In order to answer this question, we must first see what kind of enemy he is. If his sedition and subversion results in trampling on the rights of people and the sanctity of religion in society, it is necessary and befitting to destroy him. However, if his threat is only to individual rights and interests, [the principles of] magnanimity and benevolence requires one to hold back from punishing the enemy in such cases. His mistake should be overlooked and revenge must not be sought, and he should be dealt with accordingly.

In the Glorious Qurʾān, God says: ... *And let them excuse and forbear; do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is All-forgiving, All-merciful.* (Q24:22)



## THE EXTENT OF FRIENDSHIP AND ENMITY

أَحِبِّ حَبِيبَكَ هَوْنًا مَا عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونَ بَغِيضًا يَوْمًا مَا وَأَبْغِضْ  
بَغِيضَكَ هَوْنًا مَا عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونَ حَبِيبًا يَوْمًا مَا

*Love your friend moderately, for he may become your enemy one day and  
hate your enemy moderately, as he might one day become your friend.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 268)*

It is good for a person to be moderate and follow the middle path in all his works. Because the paths of excessiveness (*ifrāt*) or over-indulgence, and exiguousness (*tafrīt*) or falling short, cause loss and harm to those who follow them. This rule also applies to friendship and enmity. No matter how close and sincere a friend may be, it is not wise to make him privy to all one's secrets, as it might happen that one day he may turn away and become an enemy. If this were to happen, he would be able to take wrong advantage and use the secrets as a weapon against his past friend. The opposite of this is also possible. Even if a person is one's staunch enemy, he should not take the hatred and enmity to such a level that there is no turning back. Rather, he should leave room for reconciliation with him because it is possible that past enemies become good friends in the future, and show remorse and embarrassment for their previous enmity. This is part of the lofty thoughts and valuable guidance that are found in the teachings of 'Alī (‘a).

## PRIORITIZATION

لَا قُرْبَةَ بِالتَّوَافِلِ إِذَا أَضْرَّتْ بِالْفَرَائِضِ

*No closeness [to Allāh] is achieved through recommended actions if they hamper the obligatory actions.  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 39)*

In Islam, actions have been divided into five categories: obligatory (*wājib*), recommended (*mustahab*), forbidden (*ḥarām*), disliked (*makrūh*) and permitted (*mubāḥ*). Obligatory acts must be performed, recommended ones are better to perform, forbidden actions must be avoided, disliked actions are better not to perform and one may perform or avoid the actions that are permitted. A successful individual is one who performs the obligatory and recommended actions while avoiding the forbidden and disliked actions. If he is not able to do what has been recommended, then he suffices with what is obligatory. This is an accepted practice that is in line with the teachings of Islam. However, if a person deviates from this and performs recommended actions while neglecting the acts that are obligatory, he will definitely be questionable and punishable for this. If he pays more attention to recommended acts such that it hampers the due performance of the obligatory, when he should instead give priority to the latter, he will also have done wrong, for there is no reward for substituting the obligatory with the recommended.

## FAITH

الْإِيمَانُ مَعْرِفَةٌ بِالْقَلْبِ وَإِفْرَارٌ بِاللِّسَانِ وَعَمَلٌ بِالْأَرْكَانِ

*Faith is cognizance with the heart, acknowledgement with the tongue and acting with the limbs.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 227)*

Faith that is true and has penetrated the depths of one's heart, guides a person and influences his thoughts and deeds in the same way as the intellect does. When a person thinks about undertaking some task, the spirit of faith begins to sway his thoughts and he becomes cautious about his decisions. If the work he plans to do is good and righteous, his faith urges him on and makes him resolute in his decision to act on it, and if the work is evil, his faith acts as a hindrance, ensuring that he does not follow through with it.

Therefore, if we see people who claim to have faith but as far as actions are concerned, they do not show self-restraint and keep away from evil, then these are the people who do not adhere to the principles of faith and their actions are not in line with the Islamic ethos. We realise that their faith is only superficial and they do not possess true faith. The true meaning of faith was explained to us by ‘Alī (‘a). When he was asked what faith means, he said it is cognizance with the heart, acknowledging with the tongue and acting with the limbs.

## THE MOST ESTIMABLE WEALTH

أَشْرَفُ الْغِنَى تَرْكُ الْمُنَى

*The most estimable wealth is abandoning [false] aspirations.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 34)*

The aspirations of human beings are limitless and their desires are unending. Whatever they do not have, they want and when they have something, they want something bigger and better. There is no time when they consider their lives complete and all their aspirations fulfilled. If this dissatisfaction becomes excessive in a person, he will never be able to lead a life of peace and contentment, and will be incapable of enjoying the blessings that God has bestowed upon him. There is no difference between such a person and one who does not have all the blessings that he does. The latter feels deprived and needy because he lacks those things and the former too, despite having all that he does, feels dissatisfied and needy. However, if a person were to turn a blind eye to many of his aspirations and desires, he would become calmer and his mind would be at ease as he would feel satisfied with what he has.

## THE DAWN OF TRUTH

قَدْ أَضَاءَ الصُّبْحُ لِمَنِ عَيْنَيْنِ

*The day has dawned for those with eyes to see.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 169)*

Behind the veil of the apparent, there is a hidden reality. Behind the outer and ostensible form that is visible, there is an inner reality. However, this inner reality does not become manifest for every person and it does not make itself perceptible to every observer. As much as they try, the hard-hearted cannot see anything beyond the outer hull and their sight is limited to the apparent. Unveiling of the true reality is only possible for the enlightened hearts and those who possess insight and observe everything meticulously. From the very first gaze they can tell that there is something more profound and are able to read into the deeper aspects of matters. Because they have become adept at this, such people do not see anything as obscure or dark and are confident with their vision. They make judgments without hesitation and take their judgements to be correct. They are sure that whatever they have seen, they have seen correctly. And indeed it is thus, because for the seers who see in the light, there is no doubt and hesitation.

## GIVING LITTLE

لَا تَسْتَحِ مِنْ إِعْطَاءِ الْقَلِيلِ فَإِنَّ الْحِرْمَانَ أَقَلُّ مِنْهُ

*Do not be ashamed of giving little, for not giving at all is even less than that.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 67)*

When a person knows that a certain individual is truly in need and deserves to be assisted, and he is able to fulfil his humanitarian obligation, he must immediately give monetary assistance to that individual without delay. On the other hand, if he establishes that the person is deserving, but does not have the ability to assist him financially and is unable to give him the amount he needs, he feels ashamed of giving him anything less.

What should he do in such a case? Should he not help the person at all and forgo the blessing of giving while depriving the needy one of even the least assistance? Or should he assist him with as much as he can afford to give, without feeling ashamed or embarrassed? The answer to this question has been given in the above statement of the wise master, ‘Alī (‘a).

## FORBEARANCE

### اَلْحِلْمُ عَشِيرَةٌ

*Forbearance is [like] a tribe.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 418)*

One of the praiseworthy traits is forbearance (ḥilm). Forbearance means behaving in a calm and sensible way about something that one has a right to be very upset or angry about. The person who has this trait is referred to as being forbearing (ḥalīm) because he bears the trouble and distress that other people burden him with, as if it were some heavy load that he was carrying on his shoulders. He prefers to endure the hardship of overlooking all that has been done to him. Of course, as a consequence of this forbearance, there are some positive effects that come about. For example, when a person who has forbearance behaves patiently with the ignorant, opting to remain silent and bear their insolence, it is but natural that others will take his side and wish to help him. People will admire and support him and will defend him like a member of their tribe or family, against the ignorant one. For this reason it has been said that forbearance is an armed battalion that comes to the aid of a person whenever necessary, at no cost.

## THE GREATEST WEALTH

الْغِنَى الْأَكْبَرُ الْيَأْسُ عَمَّا فِي أَيْدِي النَّاسِ

*The greatest independence is having no hope of acquiring that which others possess.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 342)*

Why do human beings expect anything from others? Why should a person look at the possessions of people? What, pray tell, can people do for him? One who is himself dependent and does not know anything about his future except that which is apparent, and if there are any impediments that he comes across, he is unable to surmount them; how can such a person assist someone else, and who can rely on a person with such weakness and expect anything from him?

How good it would be if man were to cut off his expectations and hopes from all people, considering them to be incapable of fulfilling his needs and realising that they are powerless, and turn instead to the One whose power has no limits, relying only on God and seeking the fulfilment of his needs from Him alone. In this way, a person becomes independent and free from having to rely on anyone. He can, with Allah's help, stand on his own feet. He can strive and struggle, bearing the hardships that come his way, and in the end arrive at the result that he wants. He becomes successful and prosperous, living a life of respect and dying a death of honour.



## THE BIGGEST FLAW

أَكْبَرُ الْعَيْبِ أَنْ تَعِيبَ مَا فِيكَ مِثْلُهُ

*The biggest flaw is for you to fault others for what is [also] in yourself.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 353)*

A person who is wise and understanding always tries to discipline himself and attempts to remove all the flaws and evil traits that he finds in himself while carrying out the duties that he is responsible for and the work that has been entrusted to him. Such a person never turns his attention towards the flaws of others and is not willing to spy on them in order to learn their shortcomings. He considers this act as blameworthy and against the principles of humanity. On the other hand, an ignorant and childish person never thinks about improving himself and always looks for faults in others. He totally ignores himself and looks keenly at others in order to discover their flaws so that he may criticize them. Such a person becomes so preoccupied with his fault-finding that he completely neglects himself; while the same faults that he discovers in others, for which he censures them, are to be found in himself also! Such a person should know that this, in itself, is the biggest flaw.

## HONOUR AND NOBILITY

مِنْ أَشْرَفِ أَفْعَالِ الْكَرِيمِ غَفْلَتُهُ عَمَّا يَعْلَمُ

*One of the noblest actions of the honourable one is ignoring that which he knows [of other's faults].*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 222)*

A vile person is always curious about others and tries to find out about them so that he can become aware of their faults and expose them, as well as criticize those who possess them. If he is unable to see anything apparently wrong in someone, he tries to look for something in the person's character or speech that he can use to censure him. If he is not sure about the person's fault, he relies on guesses and assumptions in his criticisms.

An honourable person, on the other hand, acts quite differently. He is preoccupied with his own work and never interferes in the affairs of others. He does not spy on others and does not talk about others needlessly. If he becomes certain about a flaw in someone and is sure about his fault, he ignores and overlooks it and does not go about telling everyone about it in order to humiliate him. If he finds someone being disrespectful, because of his lofty character, he does not react in a manner that would disgrace him in the eyes of others. In this way, he neither indulges the person who is disrespectful nor does he show displeasure; rather, he forgoes his right to retaliate.

## ACCEPTANCE OF DEEDS

لَا يَقِلُّ عَمَلٌ مَعَ التَّقْوَى وَكَيْفَ يَقِلُّ مَا يُتَقَبَّلُ

*Action with God-wariness is never little, and how can something that is  
accepted [by Allah] be [considered] little?!*  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 95)

God Almighty has said in the Qur'ān: *Allāh accepts only from the God-wary* (Q5:27). The philosophy behind this is that pious and God-fearing people perform every action for the sake of God and in order to attain nearness to Him. There is no showing off or ostentation in what they do. In this way, their actions have the qualities that make them worthy of acceptance. However, those who are not God-wary perform their good deeds only to show off, not because they want to obey the commandments of God. For this reason, their actions do not fulfil the requirements of worship and thus do not reach the level of acceptance.

No matter how small or seemingly insignificant the action of a God-wary person may be, because it is accepted by God, it has great value and shines out in his book of deeds. One day he will be amply rewarded for it. As for the person who lacks piety and God-wariness, no matter how numerous his deeds are, they lack value and substance because they are not accepted and hence do not carry any reward.

## THE SUCCESSFUL FAILURE

مَا ظَفَرَ مَنْ ظَفَرَ الْإِثْمَ بِهِ وَالْغَالِبُ بِالشَّرِّ مَغْلُوبٌ

*One who succeeds by sinning is not [truly] successful and one who gains victory through evil is [actually] defeated.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 327)*

Some people use a lot of persistence and coercion in order to gain the upper hand over their enemies and to remove them from their path in order to reach their goals. If these people were to use tact and consideration instead, without exceeding the boundaries of religion, to overcome their enemies, they would be truly successful. When people apply illegitimate means to achieve their goals and are successful in defeating their enemies, it will only be an apparent victory that they will have attained. They should know that in reality, they have been defeated, because they have made themselves the targets of divine wrath and will have to face eternal punishment. Every action that is outside the path of truth does not last, and it is not possible to use cunning and craftiness in order to accomplish one's evil goals forever. In the end, oppression is sure to bring humiliation.

## BEING FIRST TO INITIATE A GOOD DEED

إِذَا حُيِّتَ بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيِّ بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا وَإِذَا أُسْدِيَتْ إِلَيْكَ يَدٌ فَكَافِئْهَا بِمَا  
يُرِي عَلَيْهَا وَالْفَضْلُ مَعَ ذَلِكَ لِلْبَادِي

*When you are greeted with a greeting, then reply with a better greeting, and  
when you are offered a hand, then repay the good turn with a better one;  
and the greater merit in all this is for the one who initiates.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 62)*

It is human nature to be pleased by the act of doing good to others and assisting them. When a person does someone a favour or a good turn, he feels proud and pleased with himself. Whenever a person is treated with kindness, he naturally feels inclined to repay the act of kindness using any means at his disposal.

If we assume that a person repaid an act of kindness with a better act of kindness, who would have earned greater merit? The first person who initiated the kind act or the second one whose act was better? The apparent answer would be that the second one gains greater merit. However, in reality it is the first person who earns more merit. This is because he was the one who took the initiative in the first place and opened the door of kindness, and as a result of this, it made the second person perform another act of kindness in order to repay the good that was done to him.

## YOUR MESSENGER AND MESSAGE

رَسُولُكَ تَرْجُمَانُ عَقْلِكَ وَكِتَابُكَ أَبْلَغُ مَا يَنْطِقُ عَنْكَ

*Your messenger is the interpreter of your intellect, and your writing is the most eloquent thing that speaks on your behalf.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 301)*

It is not possible for a person to perform all his work himself, and he is forced to, at some point, take assistance from others to get some tasks done. For example, if one has to meet someone to discuss something and for some reason he is unable to make it for the meeting, he is left with no choice but to send someone else on his behalf to convey the message to the other person. It is obvious that the person whom he should send for such work must be wise and astute, and he should be someone who would perform the task correctly, because the approach and attitude of the messenger reflects the wisdom and intelligence of the one who has sent him. If one wants to take extra precaution and ensure that nothing goes wrong, he has to adopt another method of conveying his message that will guarantee that what he wants to say is conveyed in the manner he seeks. This is done by writing a letter. He can be careful to follow the suitable etiquette in his address when he writes the letter himself and there would be no risk of having the messenger say something inappropriate.

## CORRECT METHOD OF PREACHING RELIGION (TABLĪGH)

الْفَقِيهُ كُلُّ الْفَقِيهِ مَنْ لَمْ يُقْنِطِ النَّاسَ مِنْ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ وَلَمْ يُؤْيسِهِمْ مِنْ رَوْحِ  
اللَّهِ وَلَمْ يُؤْمِنْهُمْ مِنْ مَكْرِ اللَّهِ

*The true scholar is one who neither makes people lose hope in the mercy of Allah and despair of His compassion, nor feel safe from the Allah's scheme.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 90)*

The individuals who have attained a correct understanding of religion and want to convey the teachings to others have a grave responsibility on their shoulders. This is because they need to skilfully gauge the intelligence and comprehension of the people in order to effectively carry out their propagation of religious teachings. Their speech must be eloquent and appealing. Whenever they want to remind people about the mercy or wrath of God, they should ensure that they do not go to extremes. It should not be the case that one concentrates only on giving glad tidings to the people about the compassion of Allah and about Paradise, until they begin to take divine commandments lightly. Nor should he threaten the people with divine wrath and hellfire so much that they lose all hope. Rather, he should maintain a balance between these two and place both hope and fear in the hearts of people. In this way, religious preaching becomes more effective and the advice given by the preachers reaches the depths of people's hearts.

## LEARNING AND TEACHING

مَا أَخَذَ اللَّهُ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْجَهْلِ أَنْ يَتَعَلَّمُوا حَتَّى أَخَذَ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْعِلْمِ أَنْ  
يُعَلِّمُوا

*Allah did not command the ignorant to learn until He had commanded the  
learned to teach.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 478)*

No religion has emphasized the importance of acquiring knowledge as much as Islam. Lofty sayings and wonderful maxims can be found in Islamic teachings encouraging people to acquire knowledge. Who can listen to these injunctions and not be affected positively by them? And who can study these instructions and commandments without submitting himself to the reality that can be seen manifestly in them?

Of course, in the same way that Islam has stressed the importance of learning, it has also highlighted the importance of teaching others. It is through these two interdependent duties – for the ignorant to learn and the learned to teach – that the fruitless tree of ignorance and illiteracy is uprooted and the fruitful tree of knowledge is planted in its place. Then, in the shade of this tree, communities can reach great heights and, by correctly using the knowledge they have gained, they can attain peace and prosperity.



## GOD-WARINESS

### التَّقَى رَئِيسُ الْأَخْلَاقِ

*God-wariness is the doyen of good morals.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 410)*

*Taqwā* literally means to ‘preserve’ and ‘be careful’. In the science of ethics, it refers to the fear of God in a human being that keeps him from committing sins. A person who has the ability of controlling himself and overcoming his desires, following his intellect and obeying the divine commandments, is said to be pious and God-wary (*muttaqī*).

A God-wary person knows what is good for him. It is as if he has an inner guide that commands or forbids him at every stage. The God-wary individual always carries out his religious obligations; whether he is alone, with friends, in a gathering or in any other situation - he never abandons his duties. Because a pious person has the attribute of God-wariness, he or she also possesses the other positive traits of generosity, courage, forbearance, chastity etc. Would it not be true, therefore, to conclude that the attribute of God-wariness is pre-eminent among all positive qualities?

## GOOD HEALTH AND INDEPENDENCE

لَا يَنْبَغِي لِلْعَبْدِ أَنْ يَتَّقَ بِمُحْصَلَتَيْنِ الْعَافِيَةِ وَالْغِنَى بَيْنَا تَرَاهُ مُعَافً إِذْ سَقِمَ وَ  
بَيْنَا تَرَاهُ غَنِيًّا إِذْ افْتَقَرَ

*A person should not rely on two things: good health and wealth. One may be healthy at one moment and fall sick the next, and one may be rich one moment and poor the next.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 426)*

Good health and financial independence are two great blessings that bring about valuable opportunities for human beings. A wise person understands their importance and takes maximum advantage of them to do good because he is always preoccupied by thoughts of the day when these two blessings may be taken away from him. He considers them to be precious and treasures them. On the other hand, a negligent person becomes inebriated and arrogant because of his wealth and wellbeing. He only comes to his senses when he has lost these two blessings and realises that he never made good use of his time when he was healthy and able.

## PROVISIONS

بُئْسَ الرَّأْدُ إِلَى الْمَعَادِ الْعُدْوَانُ عَلَى الْعِبَادِ

*What a bad provision for the Hereafter oppressiveness to the servants [of  
Allah] is!*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 221)*

Despite the fact that the human being leaves this world empty-handed and embarks on a long and dangerous journey, he still has some immaterial provisions with him. If these spiritual provisions are good, it will lead to his salvation but if the provisions are bad, it will be the cause of his damnation. God has mentioned the best provision in the Qurʾān: *And take provision, for indeed the best provision is God-wariness.* (Q2:197)

Fortunate are those who acquire this provision. They are on the side of God's mercy and attain everlasting bliss. But how unfortunate are those who take the provisions that lead to eternal punishment! They sinned in this world and usurped the rights of others. They did things that led them away from the mercy of God so they will not benefit from His mercy on the Day of Resurrection. They do not deserve to enter the Paradise of eternal bliss that has been created by the Almighty, and fall instead into abjection and wretchedness. Now we read the description of the worst provision in the words of ʿAlī (ʿa), so we should ensure that we do not take it with us.

## ARCHERY WITHOUT A BOW

الدَّاعِي بِلا عَمَلٍ كَالرَّامِي بِلا وَتَرٍ

*The one who supplicates without taking [any] action is like the archer [who wants to shoot] without a bow.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 337)*

It is out of the mercy and compassion that God has for His creation that He has promised to respond to the supplication of the supplicant. This means that if someone asks God for something and there is no hindrance or reason for denial, then God gives him what he asks for. However, when a person wishes to supplicate, he should first fulfil the conditions and the prerequisites of supplication so that there is no hindrance to its acceptance. What are these conditions and prerequisites? First, one should act upon all the divine commandments. Second, he should keep his heart and tongue free from rancour and evil. Finally, he should supplicate sincerely and ask God for what he wants. If, after all this, his supplication is not answered, he should not get upset or have negative thoughts about God. He should have conviction and believe that God knows that it is not good for him to get what he wants. He should be satisfied with this and must not be disheartened. He should not stop supplicating to God and asking Him for other things that he needs.

## EXPIATION FOR SINS

مِنْ كَفَّارَاتِ الذُّنُوبِ الْعِظَامِ إِغَاثَةُ الْمَلْهُوفِ وَالتَّنْفِيسُ عَنِ الْمَكْرُوبِ

*One of the expiations for great sins is aiding the aggrieved and relieving the distressed.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 24)*

There is a force inside every human being which is known as *al-nafs al-ammārah*. Unlike the intellect, this aspect of the human soul prompts human beings to do evil. It is possible for a person to become contaminated by sin because of the whisperings of this tempting soul and this can result in even more audaciousness to commit graver sins. In the end, a person loses all remorse and feels no guilt for his actions. But an intelligent person, who pays heed to the self-reproach of his soul for the sin he has committed, is always thinking about ways to make amends for what he has done. Whenever an opportunity to do this comes his way, he grabs the opportunity and does what is needed to purify himself from the filth of sin so that he can remain safe from its consequences and outcomes.

## THE JIHĀD FOR WOMEN

### جِهَادُ الْمَرْأَةِ حُسْنُ التَّبَعْلِ

*The Jihād for women is being good wives to their husbands.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 137)*

In the sacred religion of Islam, every individual has a specific role to play and if each person carries out his or her responsibilities, people will be able to live peacefully, without any encumbrances. One of the important responsibilities for maintaining the system of beliefs is *jihād*. Jihād means fighting the enemies and the elements that aim to corrupt the true divine message, and this is not possible without selfless dedication and fearless valour. This kind of jihād is incumbent on men, so that the rule of God may be established the way it is meant to be, without anything obstructing it or coming in its way, so that social justice may prevail. Marital life, which is one aspect of social life, also requires jihād and selfless struggle in order to ensure the comfort and welfare of the spouses. Unlike the first kind of jihād, this jihād is incumbent on the women, and it results in a more positive atmosphere at home and a stronger and more tight-knit family. It is the jihād of being good wives to their husbands. Of course we do not need to explain that men too, have certain responsibilities in their marital life.

## FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

مَا أَضْمَرَ أَحَدٌ شَيْئاً إِلَّا ظَهَرَ فِي فَلَتَاتِ لِسَانِهِ وَصَفَحَاتِ وَجْهِهِ

*Nobody conceals anything in his heart but that it gets manifested in the slips of his tongue and the expressions on his face.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 26)*

At times a person may face some unpleasant situations in this world and at other times he may experience some joyous events. For this reason, he may at times be unhappy while at other times he may be cheerful. These feelings of sadness and delight are related to the heart. No matter how hard a person tries to cover up his inner feelings of sorrow or joy and hide his love or hatred, it cannot be done. How is it possible for one to cover up that which is in the treasure chest of his heart and prevent it from becoming manifested? Human beings have no such ability! No matter how much they control their tongues, they still accidentally end up saying that which they do not mean to, and even if they try to control their facial expressions so as not to reveal what they feel, the astute among the people are still able to tell what they are trying to hide.

## ENVY

### صِحَّةُ الْجَسَدِ مِنْ قِلَّةِ الْحَسَدِ

*Physical wellbeing results from lack of envy.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 256)*

The meaning of envy is to desire that another person should not possess a merit or blessing and to wish for his blessing or merit to be taken away from him. A person who is always jealous is known as *ḥasūd*. Such a person gains nothing from his envy but distress and self-torment, and as a result even his physical wellbeing is affected. Whether he likes it or not, a jealous person is recognized for his jealousy, and thus he loses his respect and esteem in the eyes of the people. One who possesses this disliked trait should seriously think of ways to cure himself of this spiritual malady. If an envious person thinks a little, he will realise that he has chosen the wrong path and is risking his own wellbeing. If the person he is envious of loses his blessings or merits, what good will it do to him and how will it benefit him? A wise and intelligent person thinks of improving himself and progressing towards his intended goals without looking with eyes of jealousy at the people around him. He does not concern himself with the affairs of others. Instead, he works to attain his objectives and in most cases, he is successful in doing so.



## TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD

إِنَّ الْحَقَّ ثَقِيلٌ مَرِيءٌ وَإِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ خَفِيفٌ وَبِئْسَ

*Truth is heavy and wholesome whereas falsehood is light and insalubrious.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 376)*

Whoever a person may be, he should not consider only the present effects of his actions. Rather, he should think about their end results and consequences. If he does this, he will follow the truth without worrying about its bitterness because he knows that its consequences are good and, just like bitter medicine, its bitter taste lasts for only a short while before giving way to the sweetness of good health. He should keep away from falsehood and not fall for its apparent beauty because its consequence is detrimental, and an intelligent person does not go after something that may cause him great harm. The testament to this is seen in the actions of those who struggled in the path of truth and fought against falsehood. After bearing endless hardships and tribulations, they attained victory and their names were inscribed in the annals of history to last for eternity. However, those wicked people who took the side of falsehood were not able to maintain their authority and hold on to the things they coveted. In the end they were defeated and destroyed.

## RULING OVER THE HEARTS

قُلُوبُ الرِّجَالِ وَحْشِيَّةٌ فَمَنْ تَأَلَّفَهَا أَقْبَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ

*The hearts of men are wild, so whoever tames them [by showing them affection], they turn towards him.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 50)*

Only the society that is built on the foundation of love, and whose members have affection for one another, is truly felicitous. However, this affection should be brought about through compassion and conciliation. It is not sufficient just to be close to one another and interact with each other. People often meet each other in the streets and alleys and in other places, but as long as their hearts are not inclined towards one another, there is no true affection between them. This is because the hearts of people are like wild animals that live in the forests or mountain-sides. These animals fear human beings and run away from them. In order to tame and domesticate these animals, kindness and gentleness is required. The hearts of human beings are also like this. They do not automatically incline towards anyone, unless they feel affection. Therefore, those who try to get people to like them through harshness and coercion are gravely mistaken in their approach.

## THE THREAT TO ONE'S DIGNITY

مَنْ ضَنَّ بِعِرْضِهِ فَلْيَدَعْ الْمِرَاءَ

*Whoever wishes to preserve his dignity should eschew disputes.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 362)*

When a wise believer listens to someone's speech, if what is said is true, he accepts it and if what is said is false, he politely draws the speaker's attention to his mistake and gently explains to him where he went wrong so that he becomes satisfied. Of course, this can only be done in cases where the speaker is not stubborn. However, if the one who has said something wrong is obstinate and maintains that he is right, insisting that his baseless statements are true, and no matter how much one tries to explain his mistake to him, he is unwilling to take back his words, in such a case the speaker has crossed the boundaries of regular discourse and has taken an approach that is considered contentious. This approach is disliked and usually results in arguments and disputes between individuals, and in the process, it damages the reputation and dignity of both parties.

## SELF-ADMIRATION

مَنْ رَضِيَ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ كَثُرَ السَّخَطُ عَلَيْهِ

*Whoever is pleased with himself has many who are angry with him.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 6)*

Indeed, many people are pleased with themselves. They always consider themselves to be on the right and do not scrutinize their own behaviour. Such people think that they are free from all flaws and have no faults whatsoever. They think they have no weak points in themselves yet all the other people have faults and flaws, and make mistakes in their actions. But the reality is something quite different! They are gravely mistaken in thinking this and have become the targets of the psychological illness of ‘self-admiration’.

If these people were to awaken from their arrogance-induced delusion, it is possible for them to save themselves from the evil consequences of this trait. However, if they continue in their self-admiration and do not change their ways, never accepting the possibility that they too may make mistakes, it will not be long before people begin to despise them and they may end up being left alone and rejected by society.

## BEING OPINIONATED

مَنْ اسْتَبَدَّ بِرَأْيِهِ هَلَكَ وَمَنْ شَاوَرَ الرِّجَالَ شَارَكَهَا فِي عُقُولِهَا

*One who is opinionated is destroyed and one who consults the experts  
partakes of their intelligence.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 161)*

Just as a person is incapable of carrying a heavy load on his own and is not able to do the work that requires many people, working together, to accomplish, in the same way it is not always possible for one person, thinking alone, to come up with the solutions to all problems and difficulties, and he must consult with others and take benefit from their opinions and suggestions. This is also the philosophy behind the formation of various councils, associations and committees. It is done so that people can come together and discuss matters among themselves, and each one can come up with suggestions about how to achieve their common goals. Then, by taking the majority view into account, they can select the easiest and most appropriate course of action so as to arrive at the desired outcome.

If a person is obstinate and unwilling to accept the opinions of the experts, depending instead on his own opinion, it is quite certain that he will not succeed in his endeavours and will return perplexed and confounded.

## THE SELF-MADE MAN

مَنْ أَبْطَأَ بِهِ عَمَلُهُ لَمْ يُسْرِعْ بِهِ نَسَبُهُ

*One who is slowed down by his action cannot be hastened by his lineage.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 389)*

There is no doubt that a noble lineage and ancestry has a profound effect on human beings and whether we are willing to admit it or not, an honourable ancestry brings about certain merits in individuals. However, is having a noble lineage enough to ensure the excellence and nobleness of a person or not? Aside from the fact that we cannot give an affirmative answer to this question, it must be said that one's lineage can only provide the aptitude and capacity for advancement and progress. However, in order to make use of his aptitude, one has to work hard and strive, and this is dependent on his own efforts. If a person does not make any effort, the progress and the advancement that is expected of him [due to his honourable lineage] will not come about.

## FOR THE SAKE OF TRUTH

مَنْ أَحَدَّ سِنَانَ الْغَضَبِ لِلَّهِ قَوِيَ عَلَى قَتْلِ أَشْدَّاءِ الْبَاطِلِ

*He who sharpens the spearhead of anger for the sake of Allah acquires the strength to defeat the stalwarts of falsehood.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 174)*

Truth always prevails over falsehood. Those who turn towards God are delivered and those who turn away from God are doomed. Whatever godly people do, they do for the sake of God and whatever faithless people do, they do out of lust and desire. The Almighty helps those who follow the truth and humiliates those who follow falsehood. Undoubtedly, any work that is started for the sake of God will be completed successfully, whereas the work that is done for other than God will be incomplete and ineffectual. This is a divine promise, and God's promise is always true.

Therefore, those who try to rectify the society by attempting to remove corruption and taking a stand against vice and evil, all for the sake of God, should know that God is with them, for this has been proven by experience. It has been seen that such individuals are always helped and strengthened by God, and thus they are never defeated. Do you doubt this? Pick up any work of history and flip through it; you will then know what the reality is.

## THE OBJECT OF SUSPICION

مَنْ وَضَعَ نَفْسَهُ مَوَاضِعَ التُّهْمَةِ فَلَا يُلُومَنَّ مَنْ أَسَاءَ بِهِ الظَّنَّ

*Whoever puts himself in dubious situations should not blame the one who thinks negatively of him.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 159)*

The glaring eyes of uncouth people are always gazing probingly at others as they try to scrutinize their actions and behaviour. This kind of curiosity is not appropriate and is only based on malicious intentions. It is for this reason that such people often pass judgments about others without any investigation, basing their conclusions on flimsy evidence. Sometimes it so happens that they accuse someone of deviation after they witness the smallest of actions from them. They raise their voices and loudly begin levelling accusations and pointing fingers. In such cases, what is one's responsibility? Should a person flagrantly put himself in a position where he can be the target of such accusations? Or should he be careful, as much as possible, not to do anything that could cause others to suspect and accuse him, thereby tarnishing his name? We ask this question to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī ('a), and seek the answer from him.



## DO NOT BECOME DISHEARTENED

لَا يُزْهَدَنَّكَ فِي الْمَعْرُوفِ مَنْ لَا يَشْكُرُهُ لَكَ فَقَدْ يَشْكُرُكَ عَلَيْهِ مَنْ لَا  
يَسْتَمْتَعُ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْهُ وَقَدْ تُدْرِكُ مِنْ شُكْرِ الشَّاكِرِ أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا أَضَاعَ الْكَافِرُ،  
وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

*Never let one who shows no gratitude for your benevolence deter you from it, for you are thanked by the One who does not benefit from any of it; and more is to be gained from the gratitude of the Thankful Lord than what is neglected by the ingrate, and Allah loves the virtuous.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 204)*

How good it would be if people had foresightedness when carrying out any good deed, and if the virtuous actions they performed and the kindness they showed to others were solely to please God. If this was the case, they would not get upset when the person whom they showed kindness to fails to express his gratitude, and would seek recompense and reward only from God. People who do good with this intention remove distress and anguish from others and never get tired of doing good. By not worrying about whether people appreciate their kindness, they continue carrying out benevolent acts and are able to serve others in a more effective manner. All this is the result of their sincere intention and endeavour.

## WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS WORLD?

إِنَّ الدُّنْيَا دَارُ صِدْقٍ لِمَنْ صَدَقَهَا وَدَارُ غَافِيَةٍ لِمَنْ فَهَمَ عَنْهَا وَدَارُ غِنَى  
لِمَنْ تَزَوَّدَ مِنْهَا وَدَارُ مَوْعِظَةٍ لِمَنِ اتَّعَظَ بِهَا مَسْجِدُ أَحِبَّاءِ اللَّهِ وَمُصَلَّى  
مَلَائِكَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَهْبِطُ وَحْيِ اللَّهِ وَمَتَجَرُّ أَوْلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ اُكْتَسَبُوا فِيهَا الرَّحْمَةُ  
وَرَبِحُوا فِيهَا الْجَنَّةَ

*Verily this world is the abode of truth for the one who approaches it truthfully, the abode of wellbeing for the one who recognizes and understands it, the abode of riches for the one who takes provisions from it [for the Hereafter] and the abode of good counsel for the one who takes advice from it. It is the place of prostration for the beloved of Allah and the place of worship for the angels of Allah. It is where the revelation was sent down and is the marketplace for the close friends of Allah, wherein they earn His mercy and gain [entry into] Paradise.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 131)*

Our spiritual leaders have always kept the betterment of the community in mind, as is reflected in their words and wise counsel. It is we who must ponder upon their statements in order to truly understand them. We should never take their words lightly and pass them by without deep reflection, thereby losing the right path and the guidance that they have given us. In the sayings of ‘Alī (‘a) and

the other Imāms, we see denigratory words about this world. Some people have misconstrued these words and have deviated from what they meant. Others are confused and do not know how to implement these teachings practically in their lives. Yet others completely reject this attitude towards the world. In this statement, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) has spoken about the subject clearly and has made the matter manifest.

## TWO WHO NEVER GET SATISFIED

مَنْهُمَا لَا يَشْبَعَانِ طَالِبُ عِلْمٍ وَطَالِبُ دُنْيَا

*Two seekers are never satisfied: the seeker of knowledge and the seeker of this world.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 457)*

Human beings need both physical and spiritual nourishment. As for the spiritual nourishment, people are always seeking out the truth and learning that which they were ignorant of. When a person learns something that he never knew, a sense of happiness and joy comes over him. Then it must be seen what means a person uses to reach his goals and get what he seeks. It is quite evident that one can only realize his aspirations through knowledge, because it is knowledge that tears away the dark veils of ignorance and takes man into the bright valley of erudition. Some people are thirsty for spiritual perfection and seek advancement through knowledge, but no matter how much they progress, they still feel it is not enough. It is as though they are unable to satisfy themselves with their limited knowledge. On the other hand, there are some who are inclined to the physical world and seek material perfection through acquiring wealth and affluence. However, in this quest too, there is no end in sight. It is as if those who seek it are unable to stop themselves from wanting more and more.

## AMIABILITY

### التَّوَدُّدُ نِصْفُ الْعَقْلِ

*Being amiable [and friendly] is half of intelligence.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 142)*

A human being sees that he is not alone on this earth and there are others like him living here. He comes to the realization that like himself, they too have needs and desires. They too wish to benefit from the blessings that have been bestowed on humankind, to be shown affection and to remain safe from harm. If a person is able to realize this fact with the help of his intellect, he will be in a better position to treat other people amiably. He will be affable with them and show kindness towards them. He will meet them with a cheerful face and will be pleased to mingle with them. On the other hand, if one does not pay heed to his intellect and does not think about other human beings, a state of discomposure overcomes him. Such a person does not feel affection for anyone other than himself. The terms compassion and love are removed from his dictionary of social discourse. His smile turns into a frown. Pleasure turns into bitterness. This is when a human being loses his humanness and becomes closer to a state that he ought not to be in.

## THE FRIEND AND FOE OF THE PROPHET (ﷺ)

إِنَّ وَلِيَّ مُحَمَّدٍ مَنْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ وَإِنْ بَعْدَتْ لِحْمَتُهُ وَإِنَّ عَدُوَّ مُحَمَّدٍ مَنْ عَصَى  
اللَّهَ وَإِنْ قَرُبَتْ قَرَابَتُهُ

*Verily the one who obeys Allah is the true friend of Muḥammad (ﷺ), even if he is not related to him, and the one who disobeys Allah is indeed the enemy of Muḥammad (ﷺ), even if he is the nearest of his relatives.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 96)*

Salmān was one of the close followers and companions of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). He was not related to the Prophet in any way, but was greatly loved by him. So much so, that the Prophet said about him, “Salmān is from us, the Ahl al-Bayt.” This was because Salmān accepted the message of the Prophet and attested to it. He had faith in the Prophet and believed in God. He accepted the divine commandments that were sent down through the Prophet wholeheartedly, and acted upon them. On the other hand, Abū Lahab, who was one of the uncles of the Prophet, became a headstrong adversary of the Noble Prophet; to the extent that a chapter of the Qur’ān was revealed condemning him. This is because he rejected the Prophet and said offensive things about him in order to hurt him. He did not recognize the One true God and disobeyed His commands. For this reason, his relationship with the Prophet was severed.

## OTHERS RATHER THAN ONE'S OWN

مَنْ ضَيَّعَهُ الْأَقْرَبُ أُتِيحَ لَهُ الْأَبْعَدُ

*One who is neglected by his near relative is [often] supported by  
a distant stranger.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 14)*

Family relationships are a natural means by which hearts are automatically drawn towards each other. It is through these same relationships that a kind of magnetic attraction comes about, even though the two sides may not be aware of it. However, at times due to certain reasons, people do not fulfill their familial responsibilities by offering assistance to their relatives who are in need. They do not consider their family ties (*ṣilat al-raḥm*) and act in accordance with the teachings of Islam. In such cases, the person who is in trouble is left alone and has to depend entirely on himself and the support of the Most Compassionate Lord. He should nevertheless know that God will send succour from the unknown to assist him, and a person from whom he never expects anything will come forward and help him. The example of this can be seen in the life of the Prophet (ṣ) himself, as his own tribe of Quraysh turned against him whereas the unrelated tribes of the Aws and Khazraj came forward to support him.

## THE PATH TO CONCILIATION

إِتَّقِ اللَّهَ بَعْضَ التَّقَى وَإِنْ قَلَّ وَاجْعَلْ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ سِتْرًا وَإِنْ رَقَّ

*Fear Allah with some God-wariness, even if it be little, and place between yourself and Him a veil [of shame], even if it be thin.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 242)*

There is no doubt that the mercy of God is limitless and His generosity is endless. However, it is necessary for a person to show some modicum of shame and modesty. It is improper for one to use the grace and bounty of God as an excuse and then lower his head and walk away. It is wrong to be immersed in lustful desires from head to toe and then, when some words are exchanged, to simply say “God is kind.” In the Glorious Qurʾān, God says: *Inform my servants that I am indeed the All-forgiving, the All-merciful, and that My punishment is a painful punishment.* (Q15:49-50)

Therefore, one should not sever his relationship with God and should not disobey His commandments. One should not be negligent and should keep some time every day to recall his misdeeds and remorsefully repent for them, so that when he finally meets his Lord, he does so without having any sins in his record of deeds.



## GUIDANCE

مَنْ حَذَّرَكَ كَمَنْ بَشَّرَكَ

*One who warns you is like the one who brings you glad tidings.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 59)*

How wonderful it would be if we were pleased when we heard words of truth and ready to wholeheartedly accept any speech that gave out the fragrance of sincere advice, not only without feeling unhappy but also by expressing our gratitude to the one offering the advice. Why? Because sometimes human beings are unable to discern what is good for them and this is why they make mistakes in their actions from time to time. If someone else becomes aware of one's mistake and realizes that he is going astray, and forbids him from doing what he is doing, or if he warns him about the evil consequences of his actions before he embarks on them, this person has shown his concern for his wellbeing and is not willing to let him fall into ruin. Such an individual has indeed done one a great favour and in the same way that a person would become pleased when he is given good news, he should also be pleased when he is forewarned about his mistakes.

## OPINIONS OF THE ELDERLY

رَأْيُ الشَّيْخِ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ جَلَدِ الْغُلَامِ

*The opinion of an elderly person is more beloved to me than the fortitude  
[and bravery] of a youth.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 86)*

It is evident that success in any endeavour depends on following the correct course of action. And coming to the right course can only be achieved through contemplation and investigation. Only those people arrive at the best course through thinking and examination who have lived for many years and experienced the vicissitudes of life, going through its ups and downs and gaining lessons along the way. These are the people who have seen the good and bad days and have tried different approaches in seeking solutions for the hardships they faced. If they were able to succeed, they became certain that their approach was correct and if they failed, they learnt where they went wrong.

Do you know who these people are? They are the insightful, elderly people. So it is a shame for a person not to benefit from the wise counsel of such experienced individuals, or to prefer the naïve liveliness and agility of the young over the prudence of the elderly.

## THE SECRET OF MAKING BLESSINGS LAST

إِنَّ لِلَّهِ عِبَادًا يَخْتَصُّهُمْ بِالنَّعَمِ لِمَنَافِعِ الْعِبَادِ فَيُقَرُّهَا فِي أَيْدِيهِمْ مَا بَدَّلُوهَا  
فَإِذَا مَنَعُوهَا نَزَعَهَا مِنْهُمْ ثُمَّ حَوَّلَهَا إِلَى غَيْرِهِمْ

*Verily Allah, the Glorified, has certain chosen servants upon whom He bestows blessings for the benefit of the people. He lets these [blessings] remain in their possession as long as they grant them [to the people], but if they withhold them [from the people], He takes away these blessings from them and transfers them to others.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 425)*

God gives some selected people His special blessings, opening the gates of His bounty for them. Why is this? It is because they assist the needy out of the lawfully earned income that He has put at their disposal. They use their God-given status and reputation to help people and solve their problems.

In order for these divine bounties to remain incessant, it is necessary that the mentioned benevolence [towards the needy] is practiced, because this is a means of showing gratitude. We all know that when we are thankful for a blessing, it is increased and multiplied, but if we are ungrateful, then the blessing is taken away.

## THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

الظَّفَرُ بِالْحَزْمِ وَالْحَزْمُ بِإِجَالَةِ الرَّأْيِ وَالرَّأْيُ بِتَحْصِينِ الْأَسْرَارِ

*Victory is attained through prudence, and prudence is the result of considering the different opinions, and the [right] opinion is [reached] by protecting secrets.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 48)*

There is nothing wrong in telling others about the blessings that God has bestowed upon oneself, in order to express gratitude for them. However, it is not appropriate to relate everything to others, because just as there are people who are one's well-wishers and supporters, there are others who are rivals, opponents and enviers as well. If this latter group comes to know about a person's projects, they can bring about obstacles for him and sabotage his work.

Therefore, those who are impatient and unable to keep their secrets hidden from others have to face the subversion of evil people and no matter how great their effort may be, they are never able to gain success in their endeavours.

## SUSTENANCE

تَنْزِلُ الْمَعُونَةُ عَلَى قَدْرِ الْمُسْتَوْنَةِ

*Assistance comes down in proportion to the sustenance required.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 139)*

The systematic order and design of the world of creation is something worthy of notice. The more a person thinks about it, the more baffling it is and the deeper he goes into it, the more perplexed he gets. If he uses all the tools at his disposal and studies the secrets of creation, after reflective observation, he comes to the conclusion that he has not even scratched the surface. He becomes certain that there exists a greater order which is beyond human reckoning and comprehension and is unaffected by our attention or inattention towards it. This sublime order continues to function and does not cease even for a single moment. This systematic organization is a manifestation of the unmatched administration of the entire creation, where each and every need of all the creatures has been adequately met so that they can continue living and thriving. Of course, for the human being faith is also necessary so that, aside from his efforts to earn his livelihood, he may be saved from all kinds of sorrow and anguish.

## THE TONGUE OF THE INTELLIGENT AND THE FOOLISH

لِسَانُ الْعَاقِلِ وَرَاءَ قَلْبِهِ وَ قَلْبُ الْأَحْمَقِ وَرَاءَ لِسَانِهِ

*The tongue of the intelligent one is behind his heart, and the heart of a fool is behind his tongue.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 40)*

An individual who has been blessed with the great bounty of intelligence depends on it in all his works and when presented with a choice, he chooses the path that his intellect guides him towards. Whenever he wishes to say something, he refers to his intellect and queries it on the right course of action. The intellect begins to study the situation and the consequences of saying what he wants to say. If it is wise and prudent to speak, it instructs him to speak and if not, it warns the person not to say what he plans to say.

However, the foolish person never pays heed to this inner advisor and never consults it before speaking so that he may consider the consequences of his speech. He says whatever he wishes and only later does he realize that he has carelessly put himself in harm's way by speaking without thinking.

## GENEROSITY

السَّخَاءُ مَا كَانَ ابْتِدَاءً، فَأَمَّا مَا كَانَ عَنْ مَسْأَلَةٍ فَحَيَاءٌ وَتَذَمُّمٌ

*Generosity is that which one initiates [himself], for if he gives after being asked, then it is [a result of] shame and embarrassment.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 53)*

Scholars of ethics and religious leaders have outlined for us the praiseworthy and blameworthy traits and characteristics, naming and defining each one of them. They have done this so meticulously that sometimes the slightest change leads to a change in the trait's name from one to another.

We have all heard about 'generosity' and know that it refers to one of the praiseworthy traits. It means: to give and bestow with munificence. Generous people, who show kindness and compassion by helping others, are loved and respected and are counted among the virtuous. The presence of such individuals is beneficial for the society and through their donations and contributions, both material and spiritual progress comes about.

However, in what situations and under what conditions can assistance be called generosity? The answer to this question can be found in the eloquent words of Imām 'Alī (‘a).

## SPEAKING

تَكَلَّمُوا تُعْرَفُوا فَإِنَّ الْمَرْءَ مَخْبُوءٌ تَحْتَ لِسَانِهِ

*Speak and you will be known, for indeed a man is hidden under his tongue.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 392)*

One of the greatest blessings and valuable boons of God to human beings is the power of speech and articulation. The Most Beneficent Lord gave this ability to man so that he may express with his tongue that which is in his heart, and convey his thoughts to others. As long as a person does not speak, his value and status remains unknown but when he opens his mouth to speak, his thoughts, attitude, knowledge and beliefs become manifested. His level of respect and his character also become known. How many among the virtuous people placed a seal of silence on their lips, such that their status remained unknown and hence people never took benefit from them, and how many of them, by breaking their silence, directed the community or society towards success and prosperity, thereby leaving behind their legacies and remaining alive in the memories of the people, even after they left this world.



## THE FELICITOUS

طُوبَى لِمَنْ ذَلَّ فِي نَفْسِهِ وَطَابَ كَسْبُهُ وَصَلَحَتْ سِرِيرَتُهُ وَحَسُنَتْ  
خَلِيقَتُهُ وَأَنْفَقَ الْفَضْلَ مِنْ مَالِهِ وَأَمْسَكَ الْفَضْلَ مِنْ لِسَانِهِ وَعَزَلَ عَنِ  
النَّاسِ شَرَّهُ وَوَسَّعَتُهُ السُّنَّةُ وَلَمْ يُنْسَبْ إِلَى بِدْعَةٍ

*Blessed is he who is humble, whose income is honest, whose inward thoughts are righteous, whose character is good, who donates his surplus wealth, who avoids vain talk, who harms no one, and who follows the sunnah [of the Prophet (ﷺ)] and keeps away from innovation.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 122)*

The speech of great people is also great and meaningful. This is because they do not speak without thought and reflection and do not say anything which is against logic and reason. If they praise someone, that person truly deserves to be praised and if they criticize someone, he is indeed worthy of criticism and censure. In short, we must be confident in the praise and criticism of the pure ones and should not assume their words to be based on personal interests and half-truths. ‘Alī (‘a), who spoke nothing but the truth, is telling us here about the success of a person who has the following qualities:

- 1) He does not deviate from the right way and the correct path in all his affairs.

2) He manages his life in accordance with the divine commandments.

3) He has a perfect understanding of religious doctrines.

4) He possesses a sense of compassion and the inclination to assist others.

5) He avoids anything that would cause harm to anyone.

## MISUSE

أَقْلُ مَا يَلْزُمُكُمْ لِلَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ أَلَّا تَسْتَعِينُوا بِنِعَمِهِ عَلَى مَعَاصِيهِ

*The least that you must do as a servant of Allah, the Glorified, is ensure that you do not use His blessings as a means of disobeying Him.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 330)*

The clouds, wind, moon and sun are all functioning so that human beings can work to earn their livelihood and not remain neglectful. The heavens and the earth are continuing in their natural course so that people may gain the vigour and strength required to live their lives. The limbs and organs of a person tell him: *O man, O he who is the greatest creation, we are under your command and supervision – so how will you treat us and what will you make us do?*

Wherever a human being looks he finds that everything speaks to him with the voice of silence, expressing submission to him and reminding him: *Everything that you see around you has been created for you and for your benefit. You are not like the other creatures; you have a responsibility!* As a human being, one needs to be humane and must work in the interest of humanity. Is it not a shame for a person to take wrong advantage of the endless blessings he is given while allowing vain desires to trample on their rights? Is it not a form of oppression to turn a blind eye to all the bounties and become a slave to one's passions?

## NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

لَا تَظُنَّنَّ بِكَلِمَةٍ خَرَجَتْ مِنْ أَحَدٍ سُوءًا وَأَنْتَ تَجِدُ لَهَا فِي الْخَيْرِ مُحْتَمَلًا

*Never think negatively of what has been spoken by someone while you can find a possible positive meaning in it.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 360)*

The religion of Islam is an ethical religion and the Prophet of Islam was a teacher of ethics. Ethical principles are based on the pure intrinsic nature of human beings, which is completely aware of the difference between good and evil. One of the vices which human beings are inherently averse to and dislike is having negative assumptions and suspicions about others. If a person is pure and sincere in his intentions, and does things logically and correctly, he will try to avoid faulting others as much as possible because he will think that they too, like himself, are trying to do things correctly. If at any time he thinks there is a probability that someone has erred in his speech, he does not pay heed to this probability and tries to look for ways to explain and interpret the speech in a way that is not negative. However, if he becomes sure that what the person has said cannot be interpreted positively and the speaker has undoubtedly uttered a falsehood or has evil intentions, he is left with no alternative but to consider that speech to be evil and wrong.

## JOY OF THE HEART

إِنَّ هَذِهِ الْقُلُوبَ تَمَلُّ كَمَا تَمَلُّ الْأَبْدَانُ فَابْتَغُوا لَهَا طَرَائِفَ الْحِكَمِ

*Verily these hearts grow weary just like bodies become weary, so seek out  
wise sayings for them.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 91)*

In this world, sometimes a person becomes sad and depressed. Of course, there are various ways of removing the sadness and becoming cheerful once again, and each person employs a different means of doing this, depending on his personal preferences and inclinations. It is generally seen that some of these means are material in nature, such as colourful flowers, lush green meadows, running streams, towering mountains, the fresh air and cool breeze of open plains, beautiful and graceful figures and by and large all the picturesque sights that can be found in nature. All these give delight to human beings, and experiencing them gives pleasure to the senses and elation to the hearts.

The other means are spiritual and have a direct effect on the hearts, causing them joy. These include wise sayings and interesting proverbs for one to ponder upon. These are the things that inspire the hearts, breathe life into them and invigorate them. Many people resort to these means to remove sorrow and pain from their hearts and achieve peace and tranquillity.

## THE WITNESS AND THE JUDGE

إِتَّقُوا مَعَاصِيَ اللَّهِ فِي الْخَلَوَاتِ فَإِنَّ الشَّاهِدَ هُوَ الْحَاكِمُ

*Be wary of sinning against Allah in private, for indeed the Witness [to it]  
is the Judge.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 324)*

Committing sins harms the sinful person and does not hurt God in any way. If a sin is committed in private, the consequences, as far as maintaining social order is concerned, are less severe. However, as far as having the audacity to defy the Divine Lord, it is no different from the sin that is done openly. This is because God knows everything and His presence encompasses everything and everyone. Nothing escapes Him and nobody can flee from His authority and sovereignty. It is therefore illogical for one to think that if he sins in private where people cannot see him, God will be unaware of what he has done. God, the Almighty, is that witness who sees everything and who, without any hesitation or indecision, judges us. It is we who must always bring ourselves to remember Him and recognize that He witnesses our actions at all times, whether we are alone or in the company of others.

## HASTE AND PROCRASTINATION

مِنَ الْحَرْقِ الْمُعَاجِلَةِ قَبْلَ الْإِمْكَانِ وَالْأَنَاءِ بَعْدَ الْفُرْصَةِ

*It is from ineptness to make haste before [having] ability, and to act slowly after getting the opportunity.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 363)*

A wise and learned person values time. This means that he knows the right time for every action and does all his work at the appropriate moment so as to achieve the best results possible. If the time for a particular action has not yet arrived, he is not hasty and remains patient. He waits until the right moment arrives and then proceeds to carry out the task that needs to be done. When the time comes, he does not make excuses and starts the work immediately. On the other hand, a weak-minded and foolish person always harms himself when he undertakes any work, because either the time and the conditions are not yet right to commence the work and he starts it impulsively, or all the pre-requirements are met and everything is ready but instead of beginning the work and continuing diligently until he completes it, he drags his feet and remains negligent.

## THE GRAVEST SIN

أَشَدُّ الذُّنُوبِ مَا اسْتَهَانَ بِهِ صَاحِبُهُ

*The gravest sin is that which is taken lightly by the one who commits it.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 348)*

Sin is defined as disobedience to God, disregarding religious laws, ignoring one's conscience, being neglectful and being audacious in one's defiance. However, at times a sinner knows that he is doing something wrong and is aware that he is disobeying and defying God. He concedes that his sin will take him away from God-wariness and virtue, and in short, he admits his mistake and has a guilty conscience. All this constitutes the requirements for repentance and purification from sin. On the other hand, sometimes a sinner considers his misdeed to be trivial and insignificant. He does not even consider his act to be an offense. It is as if he does not think his sin will remove him from the sanctuary of God's grace and take him closer to perdition. It is as though he has just performed an ordinary act. In both these cases a sin has been committed, but the first case undoubtedly carries lighter punishment, even though the sin may be greater. The second case carries a heavier punishment even if the actual sin committed is small.



## THE CONDITIONS OF FRIENDSHIP

لَا يَكُونُ الصَّدِيقُ صَدِيقًا حَتَّى يَحْفَظَ أَخَاهُ فِي ثَلَاثٍ فِي نَكْبَتِهِ وَغَيْبَتِهِ  
وَوَفَاتِهِ

*A friend is not truly a friend unless he protects his brother in three instances: in his misfortune, his absence, and his death.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 134)*

Wherever a human being lives, he is bound to come across different types of people. He has to interact with others and mingle with them. Sometimes, if he gets better acquainted with some people, he may even become their friend and they may end up becoming his close companions. However, all the people who claim to be friends are not true friends. Rather, like many who have names and titles, they only show the outward appearance of the word. But in reality, friendship is a spiritual bond which is established between two or more people, bringing their hearts close together. This bond is only strong and firm when it goes beyond the stage of verbal proclamation and outward display, and becomes a true reality. And it can only be considered a true reality when, in certain situations, its effects become apparent and manifest. Let us ponder upon what Imām ‘Alī (‘a) has said about this, so that we may understand the nature of true friendship.

## THE REQUIREMENT FOR LEADERSHIP

مَنْ نَصَبَ نَفْسَهُ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا فَلْيَبْدَأْ بِتَعْلِيمِ نَفْسِهِ قَبْلَ تَعْلِيمِ غَيْرِهِ وَ  
لِيَكُنْ تَأْدِيبُهُ بِسِيرَتِهِ قَبْلَ تَأْدِيبِهِ بِلِسَانِهِ وَ مُعَلِّمُ نَفْسِهِ وَ مُؤَدِّبُهَا أَحَقُّ  
بِالْإِجْلَالِ مِنْ مُعَلِّمِ النَّاسِ وَ مُؤَدِّبِهِمْ

*Whoever wants to take up a position of leadership should educate himself before educating others. He should preach to others with his deeds before preaching to them with his words. Whoever educates himself and improves his own character is more deserving of respect than the one who teaches others and trains them.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 73)*

Advice and counsel is of three types: (a) practical (b) verbal (c) practical and verbal. Practical counsel is where a person encourages others to do good through his own good actions and to keep away from evil through his own piety. However, he does not verbally admonish people by forbidding evil or enjoining good. Verbal counsel is where a person advises others to do good and forbids them from evil with his words, but his actions are not in accordance with his speech. Counsel which is both verbal and practical is one where a person calls people towards good with his speech and follows up by acting upon his own advice. Undoubtedly the third type of counsel is more effective than the first two. Of course, only

people who give this kind of counsel are worthy of being leaders, because they will be considered good role models, and people only follow the counsel of those whom they accept wholeheartedly.

*In the Holy Qurʾān, God says: O you who have faith! Why do you say what you do not do? It is greatly outrageous to Allah that you should say what you do not do. (Q61:2-3)*

## PARTNER IN CRIME

الرَّاضِي بِفِعْلِ قَوْمٍ كَالدَّاخِلِ فِيهِ مَعَهُمْ وَعَلَى كُلِّ دَاخِلٍ فِي بَاطِلٍ إِثْمَانٍ إِنَّهُ  
الْعَمَلُ بِهِ وَإِنَّهُ الرِّضَا بِهِ

*One who is pleased with the action of a group is like one who participates in it with them, and for everyone who participates in falsehood there are two sins: the sin of acting upon it and the sin of being pleased with it.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 154)*

One who does not participate in a certain affair and plays no role in it, directly or indirectly, yet is pleased with the events that he witnesses and has joy in his heart because of what has happened, thereby agreeing with what has been done, is actually responsible for it and partakes of the praise or blame of that action. If the deed is in accordance with truth and justice, he too will have a share of its reward and if it is based on injustice and oppression, he will also be punished for it. For this reason, we have been commanded to enjoin good and forbid evil and have been instructed, in cases where we are unable to forbid evil and prevent people from doing it, to at least consider their deed to be inappropriate and have a loathing for it in our hearts. Therefore, those who are pleased with the treachery of the treacherous, and those who would act like tyrants if they were given authority, are all partners in crime with the oppressors even though they may have not actually committed any act of oppression.

## WONDERS NEVER CEASE

عَجِبْتُ لِلْمُتَكَبِّرِ الَّذِي كَانَ بِالْأَمْسِ نُظْفَةً وَيَكُونُ غَدًا جِيفَةً وَ عَجِبْتُ  
لِمَنْ شَكَّ فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ يَرَى خَلْقَ اللَّهِ وَ عَجِبْتُ لِمَنْ نَسِيَ الْمَوْتَ وَهُوَ  
يَرَى الْمَوْتَ وَ عَجِبْتُ لِمَنْ أَنْكَرَ النَّشْأَةَ الْآخِرَى وَهُوَ يَرَى النَّشْأَةَ الْأُولَى

*I am amazed at the arrogant one who was [nothing but] a drop of semen yesterday and will tomorrow be [just] a corpse. I am amazed at the one who doubts in Allah while he sees His creation. I am amazed at the one who forgets death while he sees others dying [around him]. And I wonder at the one who denies the second genesis while he sees the first genesis.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 126)*

If the human being looks at his beginning and his end, and considers how helpless and weak he is, he will surely come down from his horse of arrogance and replace his bad character with a good one. If one observes the marvellous creation of God, he cannot help but recognize his Lord and believe in Him. Whoever sees the caravan of the dead realizes that death awaits him as well. Whoever becomes aware of the Might and Power of God realizes that everything in creation was brought into being from non-existence and without any precedent - and this leads to certitude about the Resurrection. If a person sees all this and still denies the truth, then he is surely an incredibly negligent person.

## PATIENCE

الصَّبْرُ صَبْرَانِ صَبْرٌ عَلَى مَا تَكْرَهُ وَصَبْرٌ عَمَّا تُحِبُّ

*Patience is of two types: enduring what you hate  
and abstaining from what you love.  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 55)*

When we hear the term ‘patience’, our mind immediately thinks of forbearance in hardships but in reality, this term has a much wider meaning. It includes all forms of self-restraint and tolerance. When a person faces difficulties or hardships and remains calm and unshaken, then he has exhibited patience.

When one has to perform the acts of worship that are required of him, and he finds them to be difficult and arduous, and as a result is disinclined to perform them, if he submits himself and carries out that which needs to be done, this will be considered a form of patience. Similarly, if a person wants to do something which is forbidden or abhorred by Islam, but he restrains himself and turns away from that action, then this will also be considered a form of patience.

## PERSISTENCE AND SUCCESS

لَا يَعدَمُ الصَّبُورُ الظَّفَرَ وَإِنْ طَالَ بِهِ الزَّمَانُ

*The persistent one is never deprived of success,  
even if it takes a long time [to come].  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 153)*

If you wish to remain safe and secure from destruction and calamity; if you do not want the claws of hardship to tear you to shreds; if you want peace and tranquillity to pervade every aspect of your life; if you don't want to face loss and defeat in your life and, in short, if you want to come out on top when faced with any form of difficulty, whether it lasts a short while or prolongs, then you must have perseverance and should not exceed the bounds of the sanctuary of patience. This is because patience makes your heart stronger and preserves your equanimity, granting you courage and victory. It helps you in every situation and gives you strong determination, not allowing fear and anxiety to come over you or hopelessness to overwhelm you.

It is you who must realize the value of this powerful elixir and not give it up!

## LOFTY TRAITS

بِكَثْرَةِ الصَّمْتِ تَكُونُ الْهَيْبَةُ وَبِالتَّصَفَةِ يَكْثُرُ الْمُوَاصِلُونَ وَبِالْإِفْضَالِ  
تَعْظُمُ الْأَقْدَارُ وَبِالتَّوَاضُعِ تَتِمُّ التَّعَمُّةُ وَبِاحْتِمَالِ الْمُؤْنِ يَجِبُ السُّؤْدُذُ وَ  
بِالسَّيْرِ الْعَادِلَةِ يُفْهَرُ الْمُنَاوِيُّ وَبِالْحِلْمِ عَنِ السَّفِيهِ تَكْثُرُ الْأَنْصَارُ عَلَيْهِ

*Reverence comes about through increased silence. Through fairness, more ties are established. By granting favours people become noble. Through humility blessings are perfected. By bearing the burden of providing sustenance, eminence is attained. Through a just attitude, the enemy is overcome. And by exhibiting forbearance with an insolent person, more people assist you against him.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 224)*

Man always wants to be respected and revered by others. He wants people to like him and support him. He wishes to defeat his enemies and to acquire all the comforts of life. However, these desires cannot be realized on their own. One needs to strive and struggle, and work his fingers to the bone, in order to reach these goals. The people who have these qualities are all individuals who have borne hardships and demonstrated compassion in order to reach such a status. This is what we learn from the eloquent words of ‘Alī (‘a), for his words give everlasting guidance. Of course, if someone does not follow his teachings, nothing decreases from its value.



## PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RANKS

النَّاسُ ثَلَاثَةٌ فَعَالِمٌ رَبَّانِيٌّ وَمُتَعَلِّمٌ عَلَى سَبِيلِ نَجَاةٍ وَهَمَجٌ رَعَاةٌ أَتْبَاعُ كُلِّ  
نَاعِقٍ يَمِيلُونَ مَعَ كُلِّ رِيحٍ لَمْ يَسْتَضِيئُوا بِنُورِ الْعِلْمِ وَلَمْ يَلْجَأُوا إِلَى رُكْنٍ  
وَرَثِيقٍ

*People are of three types: the godly scholar, the student who is on the path of salvation and the uncultivated rabble who run after every caller, neither seeking light from the effulgence of knowledge nor taking recourse to any strong support.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 147)*

If everyone takes a step to do good, there will be no more wrangles and peace will prevail in the world. Unfortunately however, the world is not this way. Everyone has his own way of thinking and has created a unique way of reasoning for himself. Some think correctly and have specific, lofty goals. These are wise and righteous people who are the glowing lights of the society. But there are other people who don't have clear goals and don't even know why they do certain things. These are weak-minded and ignorant people who only blindly follow the satanic ideas of others, thereby destroying themselves and dragging the society down with them. In short, people have very different goals in life. Here we see how Imam 'Alī ('a) categorizes people based on their goals in life.

## GREED

أَكْثَرُ مَصَارِعِ الْعُقُولِ تَحْتَ بُرُوقِ الْمَظَامِعِ

*The places where intellects become most deficient are under  
the flashes of greed.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 219)*

The intellect is a powerful agent that can save a person from errors and in times of hesitation and indecisiveness, it gives guidance and shows one the right course. However, it is not the case that the intellect always acts unimpeded. Sometimes it is hindered by something and one may even stray from the right course because of this. These types of hindrances are so strong that they fight the intellect and defeat it. The gravest of these hindrances is greed. Greed is like the mirage of a luscious oasis that beguiles man. When a thirsty man sees it, his eyes become fixated on it and his intellect is enthralled by it. When his eyes are opened to the reality and he finds himself at the edge of annihilation and adversity, and sees himself standing at the precipice of downfall and extinction. At this moment he realizes that it was greed that led him to this predicament. Therefore, human beings must remove greed from their hearts in order to ensure that it does not oppose the intellect and overpower it.

## THE OPPRESSOR AND THE OPPRESSED

يَوْمُ الْمَظْلُومِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِ أَشَدُّ مِنْ يَوْمِ الظَّالِمِ عَلَى الْمَظْلُومِ

*The day of [retribution for] the oppressed over the oppressor is [going to be] more severe than the day the oppressor wronged the oppressed.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 241)*

We believe that there is a Day of Judgment and that everyone will be resurrected on that day. One by one, the people will be asked about the works and deeds they performed in the world. This is the meaning of accountability in religion. The deeds and secrets of all the people will be revealed. Every individual will be dealt with in accordance with his book of deeds, and his every action will be scrutinized meticulously. On that day, nobody can deny what they have done or use lies and cunningness to feign innocence. The governor and the governed will be brought before the justice of God. The sentence of retribution will be passed against the oppressor and he will be punished for his injustice and cruelty. This is the decree of God and nothing will be able to avert it. What can one do or say to escape it? Where can one flee to? If the oppressed is under pressure in the world today, the oppressor will be under greater stress and anguish on that day. Just as the persecuted bear difficulties in this world, on that day the tyrants will suffer greatly and nobody will come to their aid.

## WORSHIP OF THE FREE

إِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ رَغْبَةً فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ التُّجَّارِ وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ رَهْبَةً  
فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ الْعَبِيدِ وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ شُكْرًا فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ الْأَحْرَارِ

*Verily a group worshipped Allah, the Glorified, out of desire [for reward] - that is the worship of the traders; and a group worshipped Him out of fear [of punishment] - that is the worship of the slaves; and a group worshipped Him out of gratitude - and that is the worship of the freemen.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 237)*

Freedom means liberty. A person who is free is liberated. The soul of a liberated person is noble, his determination is strong, his thoughts are lofty and his character is praiseworthy. His freedom is clearly evinced from his actions and demeanour. Like everyone else he makes friends with people, but for the sake of true friendship not for the sake of wealth or status. Like other believers he worships God, offers prayers, fasts and performs all the other prescribed acts of worship. However, the difference is that some people perform acts of worship in order to show off and such actions have no value. Others worship out of desire for paradise or fear of hell and by so doing, they reduce the value of their worship. However, the freeman worships because he considers God to be worthy of worship and therefore, he increases the value of his worship and earns the greatest reward for it.

## SOULLESS WORSHIP

كَمْ مِنْ صَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ صِيَامِهِ إِلَّا الْجُوعُ وَالْظَّمَأُ وَكَمْ مِنْ قَائِمٍ  
لَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ قِيَامِهِ إِلَّا السَّهَرُ وَالْعَنَاءُ حَبْدًا نَوْمُ الْأَكْيَاسِ وَإِفْطَارُهُمْ

*How many a person gains nothing from his fast but hunger and thirst, and how many a person gets nothing out of his nightly prayers but sleeplessness and exertion. How much better is the sleep of the sagacious and their dining!*  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 145)

Worship means devotion and submission to God. There is no doubt that God does not need our worship. We are the ones who need to worship Him in order to purify our souls. Whatever we do in the way of worship is an expression of submission and reverence in front of the Almighty. If one's act is in accordance with His commandments, God accepts it and as a result, a positive spiritual effect is felt in the person's heart. If he is able to continue in this manner, his heart becomes illuminated and he strives to work harder such that even the more difficult acts of worship eventually become easy for him. Such an individual wonders why other people have turned away from worshipping God. His own worship pervades all aspects of his life and its effects become manifest. This is the real goal of worship – to transform an individual, otherwise mere ostensible worship has no value or benefit, like a lifeless body and a coreless shell.

## SEEKING PARDON

الِاسْتِغْنَاءُ عَنِ الْعُذْرِ أَعَزُّ مِنَ الصِّدْقِ بِهِ

*Having no need to give an excuse is more honourable  
than giving an honest excuse.  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 329)*

If a person makes someone a promise, for example, and then does not fulfil it, or if he insults someone or harms him in any way and then tries to make up excuses and justify his action, he will most certainly have lied and sinned. However, if something unexpected comes about or due to unforeseen circumstances he has to break his promise or do something wrong, and then presents an excuse for his behaviour, his excuse will be accepted and his action will not be considered a sin. If, on the other hand, that unexpected event did not take place and the person did not have to give an excuse, it would have been better. This is because the very act of giving an excuse belittles a person somewhat and reduces his respect in the eyes of others. Therefore a person should be careful to avoid doing things or putting himself in situations where he would have to give excuses or apologize. This important lesson has also been taught to us by ‘Alī (‘a).

## SELF-RESPECT

الْمَنِيَّةُ وَلَا الدَّنِيَّةُ وَالتَّقَلُّ وَلَا التَّوَسُّلُ

*Death is preferable to abasement and having less is preferable to [the humiliation of] asking others.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 396)*

The human being has been created with a lofty nature. When he enters into the arena of life, its vicissitudes carry him up and down like waves in the sea. Then, either the loftiness of his being remains intact or it begins to wane due to the influence of his environment or the result of his upbringing. If this lofty nature becomes firmly established in an individual, he is able to put up a strong resistance against those factors that try to pull him down and in the end he is successful. Such a person is ready to give up his life but will not accept humiliation. He is willing to make do with a meagre livelihood but will not extend his hand to beg from others. This is when it can be said by him, “carrying a heavy stone to the peak of a mountain is easier and preferable to me than being under someone’s obligation.”

This is the philosophy of holding firm to one’s principles. This is the meaning of freedom. This is the meaning of a noble life. And this is the meaning of self-respect.

## INTELLECT

مَا اسْتَوْدَعَ اللَّهُ امْرَأً عَقْلاً إِلَّا لِيَسْتَنْقِذَهُ بِهِ يَوْمًا مَا

*Allah has only entrusted man with an intellect  
so that it may one day deliver him.  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 407)*

The intellect is one of the greatest gifts that the Lord of the Worlds has bestowed upon man. It shows a person the right and noble path and compels him to follow it.

The intellect illuminates the heart of a human being. It removes hesitation and indecisiveness and gives one the ability to make resolute decisions. It stands opposed to vain desires and lust and in the end, overcomes and defeats them. The intellect protects a person from mistakes and errors and if he commits a sin, it enables him to seek forgiveness and repent. It makes its possessor successful and prosperous in this world and in the Hereafter. The intellect is so important that if one possesses it, he has everything he needs and if he lacks it, he has nothing. Unlike some other things, as the intellect increases, its value becomes greater. The intellect is the best mirror through which goodness and evilness is reflected [and differentiated].



## THE SIGN OF FAITH

عَلَامَةُ الْإِيمَانِ أَنْ تُؤْثِرَ الصَّدَقَ حَيْثُ يَضُرُّكَ عَلَى الْكَذِبِ حَيْثُ يَنْفَعُكَ  
وَأَلَّا يَكُونَ فِي حَدِيثِكَ فَضْلٌ عَنْ عِلْمِكَ وَأَنْ تَتَّقِيَ اللَّهَ فِي حَدِيثِ  
غَيْرِكَ

*The sign of faith is for you to prefer the truth even when it hurts you, over a lie even when it brings benefit; and for your speech not to go beyond your knowledge; and that you should fear Allah in relating the speech of others.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 458)*

True faith is different from professed faith. It is possible for one to profess faith but lack true faith. It is also possible for one to have true faith without professing it. It is certain that faith has a direct effect on an individual and makes him do the things that please the Almighty. One of the most important parts of the human body is the tongue. A person's tongue is under his control. He uses it to say whatever brings him benefit in any given situation. However, the tongue of a faithful person is restricted. When he speaks he keeps God in mind, thinks about the consequences of his words and is careful to preserve his dignity and the dignity of others. A believer only speaks the truth, even if it is against his personal interests. He speaks only about what he knows and when he narrates something from others, he does not add any of his own opinions to it.

## KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

الْعِلْمُ مَقْرُونٌ بِالْعَمَلِ فَمَنْ عَمِلَ وَعِلْمُهُ يَهْتَفُ بِالْعَمَلِ  
فَإِنْ أَجَابَهُ وَإِلَّا ارْتَحَلَ عَنْهُ

*Knowledge is linked to action, so one who knows, acts; and knowledge calls out to action, so if it responds to it [then it stays] otherwise it departs.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 366)*

People strive to learn and gain knowledge so that they can brighten their hearts, attain insight and understanding about different issues, learn about the ways of life, and also benefit others with their knowledge. If someone makes an effort to acquire knowledge but does not act upon it; if he does not derive any benefit from it for himself or others, he will not have achieved anything from his efforts and will eventually lose that knowledge.

It is for this reason that some of the great scholars have said: *No matter how much knowledge you acquire, if you do not practice what you have learnt, you are ignorant.* They also give the following analogy: *A scholar who does not practice what he knows is like a tree without fruit.* And they say: *Through action goals are attained, not through words.* But the loftiest saying about this issue is from none other than the eloquent Master of the Believers, ‘Alī (‘a).

## KNOWLEDGE OR WEALTH?

الْعِلْمُ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْمَالِ الْعِلْمُ يَحْرُسُكَ وَأَنْتَ تَحْرُسُ الْمَالَ وَالْمَالُ تَنْقُصُهُ  
التَّفَقُّهُ وَالْعِلْمُ يَزْكُوا عَلَى الْإِنْفَاقِ وَالْعِلْمُ حَاكِمٌ وَالْمَالُ مُحْكُومٌ عَلَيْهِ  
هَلَكَ خُزَانُ الْأَمْوَالِ وَهُمْ أَحْيَاءُ وَالْعُلَمَاءُ بَاقُونَ مَا بَقِيَ الدَّهْرُ أَعْيَانُهُمْ  
مَفْقُودَةٌ وَأَمْثَالُهُمْ فِي الْقُلُوبِ مَوْجُودَةٌ

*Knowledge is better than wealth; knowledge guards you while you guard wealth. Wealth decreases when it is given away whereas knowledge increases when it is shared. Knowledge governs while wealth is governed. The keepers of wealth are destroyed in their lifetimes while scholars remain forever; their bodies are lost but their teachings remain in the hearts.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 147)*

At times those who are interested in learning about the reality of things try to compare the strengths of different things to see which is more important and substantial. One such comparison that has been made is between knowledge and wealth. Both of these are undoubtedly important for man. Knowledge is an everlasting, intangible asset whereas wealth is material and perishable. The question is always posed about which of the two is better, knowledge or wealth. Proponents of both sides have presented their arguments, but the best answer to this has been given by Imām ‘Alī (‘a).

## THE TRUE 'EID

إِنَّمَا هُوَ عِيدٌ لِمَنْ قَبِلَ اللَّهُ صِيَامَهُ وَشَكَرَ قِيَامَهُ  
وَكُلَّ يَوْمٍ لَا يُعْصَى اللَّهُ فِيهِ فَهُوَ يَوْمٌ عِيدٍ

*It is only 'Eid for the one whose fasting has been accepted by Allah and whose prayer in the night has been acknowledged by Him. Every day that Allah is not disobeyed is indeed a day of 'Eid.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 428)*

O mankind, repay your debt to the Creator and carry the burden that you have been entrusted with to its destination. Fulfil your religious obligations as God has prescribed them, for then He will reward you for your deeds. Never turn away from His commands in defiance and never sully yourselves by disobeying Him. If you adhere to this you will be honoured by your Lord. At night you will sleep on your pillow peacefully and during the day you will pass your time joyfully, as if it were a day of celebration and 'Eid. You will be happy in all the work that you do. So O son of Adam and servant of God, take your final end into account so that your whole life and all your days can be days of 'Eid.

## USURPED PROPERTY

الْحَجَرُ الْغَضْبُ فِي الدَّارِ رَهْنٌ عَلَى خَرَابِهَا

*One usurped stone in a house is sufficient to guarantee its ruin.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 240)*

People who are mindful know, see, understand, experience and take heed. It is completely evident for them that justice has good and positive consequences whereas the outcomes of injustice are evil and ugly. The building which is constructed on a foundation of truth and justice is strong and it is this strength that keeps it upright and standing for a long time, protecting it from all disasters and catastrophes. But the structure that is built on the foundation of injustice and oppression, and with unlawful wealth, is bound to crumble and collapse because of its weakness and tenuity.

Indeed, these effects are inevitable and inescapable for they stem from truth, falsehood, justice and oppression and are their natural outcomes that always come to pass. This is one of the laws of nature and has no exceptions.

## BACKBITING

### الْغِيْبَةُ جُهْدُ الْعَاجِزِ

*Backbiting is the effort of the feeble.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 461)*

Backbiting means talking about someone behind his back and saying that which he would not like said about him. Backbiting is something that is disliked in all creeds and cultures, and it is considered to be a blameworthy act that is morally wrong. The religion of Islam always warns its followers against inappropriate actions, and backbiting is considered a forbidden act in Islam. The Holy Qurʾān gives an analogy about backbiting in order to dissuade people and make them loath the act. It compares backbiting to eating the flesh of one's dead brother!

Backbiting is the weapon of the weak and they constantly use it against their enemies because they are incapable of doing anything else. For example, if one of them has a strong enemy or rival, hatred and anger boils inside him and he cannot live in peace. He constantly tries to destroy his enemy but because his enemy is very strong, he is unable to harm him. This is why, in order to appease himself, he resorts to backbiting and tries to speak ill of the person behind his back.

## OPPORTUNITIES

الْفُرْصَةُ تَمُرُّ مَرَّ السَّحَابِ فَاَنْتَهِزُوا فُرْصَ الْخَيْرِ

*Opportunity passes away [quickly] like the clouds, so seize good opportunities when they arise.*  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 21)

The advancement of a human being depends on his efforts to attain his goals. If his efforts are exerted in the correct way and at the appropriate time, he will most certainly get positive results. There are times in a person's life when, if he says something or does something at a specific moment, his words or actions bear fruit and may possibly change the course of his entire life, or even that of his children and descendants. Therefore, a person must possess *savoir-faire* and recognize the important, life-changing moments when they arise and then seize those moments without any delay or procrastination. Because if the opportunities that present themselves are lost, a person will most surely fail in his efforts and will end up full of regret.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF DIVINE COMMANDMENTS

فَرَضَ اللَّهُ الْإِيمَانَ تَطْهِيراً مِنَ الشَّرِّ وَالصَّلَاةَ تَنْزِيهاً عَنِ الْكِبَرِ وَالزَّكَاةَ  
تَسْبِيحاً لِلرِّزْقِ وَالصَّيَّامَ ابْتِلَاءً لِإِخْلَاصِ الْخَلْقِ وَالْحَجَّ تَقْوِيَةً لِلدِّينِ وَ  
الْجِهَادَ عِزّاً لِلْإِسْلَامِ وَالْأَمْرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ مَصْلَحَةً لِلْعَوَامِّ وَالتَّهْيِ عَنِ  
الْمُنْكَرِ رَدْعاً لِلْسُّفَهَاءِ

*Allah has prescribed faith as a purification from doubt, prayer as a cleansing from arrogance, alms-tax as a means of sustenance, fasting as a test of sincerity for the people, pilgrimage as a means to strengthen the religion, jihād as an honour for Islam, enjoining good as a reformation for the common people, and forbidding evil as a restraint for the insolent.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 252)*

What do we expect from divine laws and what do we hope to achieve through them? Of course, we want them to bring us spiritual benefits. We expect the laws to have a philosophy behind them along with inner meanings and underlying truths. We also want to be able to observe that they are in accordance with logic and reason. Finally, we want to be sure that Islamic laws are rational! Indeed, all the laws in Islam bring benefits, however we do not know the philosophy behind some of the laws. This does not mean that these laws do not have any purpose or benefit. Rather, through



investigation and the advancement of knowledge, we hope to discover the philosophy behind these laws as well. Until then, there is no reason to doubt that these laws also have benefits for mankind.

## BUSINESS LAWS

مَنْ أَتَجَرَ بِغَيْرِ فِقْهِ فَقَدْ ارْتَضَمَ فِي الرِّبَا

*One who carries out transactions without knowledge [of the Islamic laws of business], falls into usury.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 447)*

In Islamic law we have some discussions, based on textual and rational evidence, about the ethics of business transactions. The different types of business, conditions of trade and situations where transactions can be nullified are all discussed along with other related questions like that of credit and cash payments. In all this the rights of both parties are taken into account. Every Muslim businessman must learn these rules before embarking on trade, and should carry out his business accordingly. If one starts a business without knowing these laws in detail, he may end up carrying out a transaction that is unlawful, and the very profit he earns from it will be the cause of his destruction.

Whenever Amīr al-Mu'minīn (ؑa) went to the market, he would announce the afore-mentioned statement in a loud voice, reminding the traders to ensure that they know the laws pertaining to trade before they embark on it.

## KNOW YOUR WORTH

هَلَكَ امْرُؤٌ لَمْ يَعْرِفْ قَدْرَهُ

*The person who does not know his own value is ruined.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 149)*

If a person recognizes himself, he is able to recognize his Lord. This is why it has been said, “Whoever knows himself has indeed known his Lord.” When a person analyses himself and engages in introspection, he comes to know who he is and becomes aware of his traits and characteristics. He understands his true identity and realizes what he is and is not. He becomes cognizant of his true status and rank. Once a person knows his status, he must act according to it and fulfil his responsibilities. If he does this, he will gain the respect of all the people and will be prosperous in his life. However, if one does not attempt to recognize his status and rank, or if he is mistaken in his self-analysis, and in short, if he speaks and acts however he wishes and goes wherever he wants without considering his standing and the responsibilities that come with it, then such a person is sure to go astray and will lose all his respect in society.

## JUDGING BASED ON ASSUMPTION

لَيْسَ مِنَ الْعَدْلِ الْقَضَاءُ عَلَى الثَّقَّةِ بِالظَّنِّ

*It is not justice to judge a reliable person by conjecture [instead of accepting his testimony].*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 220)*

All people are not the same. Some are wicked and ill-natured whereas others are virtuous and good-natured. The people who are virtuous perform all their obligations without showing off or expecting praise from others. They practically show their trustworthiness and truthfulness thereby earning a good reputation in the community. Such people gain the trust of others and because they are respectable, they succeed in solving the problems of the people. Now if some inappropriate things are heard about such individuals or if doubts and suspicions are raised about their character, should we make negative assumptions about them? Should we, because of some speculations, conjectures and doubts, forget about their illustrious past and ignore the fact that they have done so much good, or should we disregard the rumours and suspicions unless we become certain? In this instance one should not be hasty to pass judgment. Here Imām ‘Alī (‘a) is telling us what our duty is and how we should act.

## CONTENTMENT

الْقَنَاعَةُ مَالٌ لَا يَنْفَدُ

*Contentment is the wealth that never perishes.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 57)*

Greed is one of the blameworthy traits and it refers to the excessive and undue effort of a human being to acquire wealth. On the other hand, contentment is one of the praiseworthy qualities and denotes the satisfaction of a person with whatever he possesses and acquires.

The person who is a slave to his greed deems whatever he has to be insufficient and whatever he earns to be a mere drop from the vast ocean. However, the one who adopts contentment has limited worldly aspirations and whenever he realizes any of his hopes, he feels that he has acquired a great blessing. He thanks God for this blessing and becomes very happy. He joyfully colours his life with the blessing and gets satisfied with it.

A contented person makes do with what he has and feels fortunate to acquire the little that he does in the way of financial income. In short, he lives in a world of his own that most other people are unaware of.

## GOOD AND EVIL DEEDS

شَتَّانَ مَا بَيْنَ عَمَلَيْنِ عَمَلٍ تَذْهَبُ لَذَّتُهُ وَتَبْقَى تَبِعَتُهُ وَعَمَلٍ تَذْهَبُ  
مُؤْنَتُهُ وَيَبْقَى أَجْرُهُ

*There is a great difference between two types of action: the action whose pleasure wanes but its [ill] effects remain and the action whose hardship disappears but its reward remains.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 121)*

Virtuous action is the action that has been permitted by divine law and the intellect, and upon which the interests of the individual and community rest, even though it is possible that a person may not be inclined towards it and it might even be something difficult for him to bear. Evil action is forbidden by divine law and the intellect, and is neither in the best interests of the individual nor the society, even if people may be inclined towards it. When one does a good deed, he pleases God and also gratifies his conscience. He forgets the hardship that he had to endure to perform the good act. But when he does something evil, he makes God angry and also agitates his inner conscience. He ends up regretting what he has done. Even if that evil act was pleasurable, the pleasure soon disappears. If a person considers this before performing any action, and if he makes his intellect the judge, he will never sully his pure nature with ugly deeds and burn in the fire of regret and remorse.

## VIRTUOUS ACTS

افْعَلُوا الْخَيْرَ وَلَا تَحْقِرُوا مِنْهُ شَيْئاً

*Do good deeds and do not consider any of it insignificant.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 422)*

Righteous people like good deeds and whenever the chance to do something good comes up, they are happy and consider it an opportunity. They deem themselves fortunate and quickly embark on performing the good act. However, some people do not have the eagerness to perform good works. In order to escape the responsibility of carrying out these works, they pass on the duty to others saying, “Why doesn’t so-and-so do this good work? He is indeed more worthy of it than me!”

The effect of this lack of enthusiasm and interest is that the other person who is expected to do the work takes it as a good opportunity to do something positive and he is successful in performing the virtuous act whereas the one who showed no eagerness or interest is bereft of the opportunity to do that good deed.

## WRESTLING WITH THE TRUTH

مَنْ صَارَعَ الْحَقَّ صَرَعَهُ

*One who wrestles with the truth is thrown down by it.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 408)*

The basis of the creation of all things is truth, meaning that everything was created by God out of wisdom and for a specific purpose. The truth is as clear as day and as firm as a mountain. When people with vision see the truth they follow it and sacrifice everything for its sake with faith and conviction. But short-sighted people and those who do not ponder deeply over matters only see the deceiving exterior and therefore, they turn away from the truth and support falsehood. Some are even more obstinate and stand up in open opposition to the truth. The similitude of those who fight against the truth is like the one who punches a mountain with his clenched fist, thinking that he can destroy it! However, the mountain will remain firm and it is he who will hurt himself. In the same way, those who oppose the truth are only wearing themselves out. In the end, those who stand against the truth will realise that success lies with the truth and all those who oppose it are defeated.



## SPEAKING LESS

إِذَا تَمَّ الْعَقْلُ نَقَصَ الْكَلَامُ

*When the intellect is complete, speech decreases.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 71)*

An intelligent person speaks only when it is prudent to speak. He thinks about what he will say and considers the appropriateness of the situation. He looks at the level and condition of the listener or the audience, and what he says is short, to the point and beneficial. The speech that results from such considerations is always interesting and thought-provoking for everyone. Nobody becomes weary of listening to it and everyone derives benefit from it.

Of course, taking all the points mentioned above into consideration is no easy task and it is incompatible with talkativeness. Therefore, if someone always pays attention to these matters, he will automatically speak less. But the one who does not take advantage of his intellect and does not pay heed to any of these issues when he speaks, says whatever comes in his mind. Of course, such a person will be talkative.

## BEING LOVED BY PEOPLE

خَالِطُوا النَّاسَ مُخَالَطَةً إِنْ مِتُّمْ مَعَهَا بَكَوْا عَلَيْكُمْ وَإِنْ عِشْتُمْ حَنُّوا  
إِلَيْكُمْ

*Interact with people in such a way that when you die, they weep over you  
and when you are alive, they yearn for your company.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 10)*

We see that some individuals are loved and admired by the people for as long as they live, and when they die, people miss them and mourn their loss. Do you know what these individuals have done to become adored and admired thus? These people chose a correct mode of social life, meaning that they never hurt or disturbed anyone for no reason. They tried to fulfil the rights of others and gain their satisfaction.

If you too want to become a beloved of the people and to be admired by them, you must adopt a wise and prudent approach when dealing with others.

## YOUR PLACE OF RESIDENCE

لَيْسَ بَلَدٌ بِأَحَقَّ بِكَ مِنْ بَلَدٍ خَيْرُ الْبِلَادِ مَا حَمَلَكَ

*There is no country (or city) that has a greater right over you than another;  
the best country is the one that bears you.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 442)*

Human beings have come to this world in order to attain perfection. They are here to develop themselves and progress, and when they become competent, they can benefit others as well. Of course an appropriate environment and atmosphere is needed where a person can strive to achieve these goals. An area is required where a person can work to earn his livelihood and where there are no hindrances to his progress. Any place where these conditions are present should be taken as the centre of a person's life and the location of his work and residence.

It is for this very reason that we see our predecessors would at times migrate from their home towns to other places. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ), too, migrated from Makkah to Madīnah and Imām ‘Alī (‘a) migrated from Madīnah to Kūfah.

## LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE

أَوْضَعُ الْعِلْمِ مَا وَقَفَ عَلَى اللِّسَانِ وَأَرْفَعُهُ مَا ظَهَرَ فِي الْجَوَارِحِ وَالْأَرْكَانِ

*The lowliest knowledge is that which stops at the tongue and the loftiest [knowledge] is that which is manifested in the organs and limbs.  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 92)*

Knowledge is one of the greatest blessings of the Almighty. Human beings have been singled out for this blessing so that in the darkness of life they may have a torch to illuminate the way for themselves and others. Is it not befitting for a person who has access to such a means of guidance not to reform himself and beautify himself with the merits of good character? Is it right for him to only share his knowledge by expressing it verbally in gatherings and not practice it, thereby reducing the value of this precious gem and giving it away as something cheap?

Absolutely not! Rather, it is necessary that knowledge and foresight guide the actions and character of a person in the right way and help to remove his faults and flaws. In other words, all the actions and endeavours of a human being should reflect his knowledge and understanding. The people who do not benefit from their knowledge by acting upon it are actually being unjust to themselves and to the knowledge itself. They have not understood the true value of knowledge.

## THE ARENA OF TRIALS

### الَوَلَايَاتُ مَضَامِيرُ الرِّجَالِ

*Seats of authority are the arenas of contest [and trial] for men.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 441)*

There is an old adage that says: *It is only when a person is tested that his true worth becomes known.* One of the trials that a person undergoes is the test of authority over others. Some people are such that when they are given any form of authority and when they enter into the arena of leadership, gaining the power to make decisions, they act expediently and skilfully, surpassing their predecessors and peers and increasing their value in society. In this way, their qualification and competence in administration is affirmed, and they impress the people with their character and policies so much that the people are never willing to allow them to step down from their positions of leadership. However, there are others who are inexperienced and do not know how to be good administrators and, because of their flawed policies, they cause chaos in the places where they govern. Such people cannot please or satisfy the people and it is for this reason that these leaders are always opposed by the people and are, in the end, overwhelmed by them such that they have no option but to step down from their positions.

## THE EXTENT OF PRAISE

الشَّئَاءُ بِأَكْثَرِ مِنَ الْإِسْتِحْقَاقِ مَلَقٌ وَالتَّقْصِيرُ عَنِ الْإِسْتِحْقَاقِ عِيٌّ أَوْ حَسَدٌ

*Praise that goes beyond what is deserved is flattery, and that which falls short of what is deserved is either inarticulateness or jealousy.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 347)*

A person should evaluate everything that he does and should be wary of the limits and extent of every action – these being the limits which correspond to reason and logic – ensuring that he does not overstep these limits. So for example, if he wants to praise and commend someone, he should take the person's status and rank into consideration and then mention his true merits and qualities, praising him as he ought to be praised. If one does not take all this into consideration and praises the person without paying heed to this matter, then he will definitely stray from the right course, meaning he will either exceed the limits or will fall short in his praise. If he exceeds the limits by overpraising the person, he will have flattered him and will have shown himself to be a lowly sycophant; and if he falls short and does not praise the person adequately, he will again have exposed his own fault. This is because praising someone inadequately shows that one is either incapable of expressing himself properly or that he is jealous of the person and therefore does not wish to praise him as he ought to be praised.

## THE WEAKEST PEOPLE

أَعْجَزُ النَّاسِ مَنْ عَجَزَ عَنِ اكْتِسَابِ الْإِخْوَانِ وَأَعْجَزُ مِنْهُ مَنْ ضَيَّعَ مَنْ  
ظَفَرَ بِهِ مِنْهُمْ

*The most incapable of all people is one who is unable to acquire sincere friends, and even more incapable than him is the one who loses those whom he was successful in acquiring.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 12)*

Vivacious people, who want to enjoy and benefit from all the different aspects of their lives, employ compassion and kindness to acquire friends. And in order to protect and preserve their friendships, they do what is required of them as sincere and good friends. In other words, they fulfil their obligations and make the necessary compromises.

On the other hand, lazy and dull people, who pass their days without any planning and are themselves unaware of the purpose of their lives, are not interested in making friends, and if by happenstance some people do become their friends, they are so indifferent to the existence of these friends that they never think about the rights of friendship let alone try to fulfil these rights. Their indifference eventually causes them to lose all their friends and everyone leaves their company.

## THE SIGNS OF AN OPPRESSOR

لِلظَّالِمِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ ثَلَاثُ عِلَامَاتٍ يَظْلِمُ مَنْ فَوْقَهُ بِالْمَعْصِيَةِ وَمَنْ دُونَهُ  
بِالْغَلْبَةِ وَيُظَاهِرُ الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمَةَ

*There are three signs of an unjust person among the people: oppressing the one who is above him by disobedience, and the one below him by overruling him, and supporting the faction of the oppressors.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 350)*

The person who strays from the path of truth and justice and does not follow the appropriate course in his personal and social life, is considered to be unjust. An oppressive person audaciously tramples on the rights of others and does not fulfil his obligations towards them. There are certain signs that enable us to recognize those who embark on this dangerous and aberrant path. These signs include: (a) According to the accepted norms, those who are in higher positions have a right to give instructions to their subordinates and they have to be obeyed. But these people do not obey their superiors and stubbornly defy their instructions. In this way, they are unjust to them. (b) They mistreat and abuse those who are under them and those whom they have authority over, never thinking about their rights or showing them any respect. (c) Aside from this, they also oppress others indirectly, meaning that they assist the oppressors and will thereby share in their ill fate in the Hereafter.



## ATTAINING ONE'S GOALS

مَنْ طَلَبَ شَيْئًا نَالَهُ أَوْ بَعْضُهُ

*Whoever seeks a thing achieves it, or [at least] part of it.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 386)*

When one decides to travel somewhere, after the decision is finalized he should prepare the provisions he needs and then start his journey, traversing the required distance before reaching his destination. Without all these steps, it is impossible for him to arrive at his destination. One who has a goal also has to make a firm decision and work hard to achieve it. Those who strive and remove the obstacles and impediments on their way, and then traverse the path to their goals, achieve success. If they are not able to realize all their aspirations, they attain at least some of them. Therefore no hard work done by anyone is without reward and it will surely pay off and bear fruit. The Holy Qur'ān says: *And that man shall have nothing but what he strives for* (Q53:39), and it is said: *In the end, one who strives to attain his goal achieves it.*

## BE YOUR OWN CUSTODIAN

يَا ابْنَ آدَمَ كُنْ وَصِيَّ نَفْسِكَ وَاعْمَلْ فِي مَالِكَ مَا تُؤْتِرُ أَنْ يُعْمَلَ فِيهِ مِنْ  
بَعْدِكَ

*O Son of Adam, be your own custodian and do with your possessions what  
you would prefer others to do with it after you [die].*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 254)*

Some people obey the Almighty and do what He has commanded, but others are so deeply engrossed in the material world that they cannot tell the difference between their heads and their feet! Their words and deeds do not go beyond the pale of the material world. It is as though they don't remember that that they must obey God and carry out the religious obligations; as if they consider themselves excused from these duties. Another group consists of those who perform physical acts of worship such as offering prayers, but eschew 'financial worship' (like paying *khums*, *zakāt*, etc.) and act stingily, unwilling to assist those who deserve assistance. Some of these people even give instructions in their wills that their religious dues should be paid from the wealth they leave behind, along with other acts of charity. However these people should do all this themselves when they are alive and not expect others to do it for them after they die. One who does not care about himself should not expect others to care about him.

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A JUDGE

لَا يُقِيمُ أَمْرَ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ إِلَّا مَنْ لَا يُضَارِعُ وَلَا يُضَارِعُ وَلَا يَتَّبِعُ الْمَظَامِعَ

*The rule of Allah, the Glorified, can only be established by the  
one who neither bends the rules, nor emulates the wrongdoers,  
nor gives in to his greed.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 110)*

Adjudication and judging between two parties is an honourable duty and a task that is carried out by the prophets and the chosen friends of God. The verdict of judges is only just and pleasing to God when they keep God in mind while passing their judgments. They should realize the grave responsibility that has been placed on their shoulders and not forget about the Day of Judgement. They must put themselves in the shoes of the person on whom they have to pass judgment and should not turn away from the guidance of their inner conscience. They must not portray truth as falsehood and falsehood as truth. They should not make agreements with the oppressors thereby trampling on the rights of the oppressed. The trap of greed must not prevent them from soaring to the heights of justice and truth. They should be ready to give up their posts rather than passing false judgements and going against divine injunctions. The law of God is always established through virtuous and righteous judges who have all the aforementioned qualities.

## STRONG DETERMINATION

الْحِلْمُ وَالْأَنَاءُ تَوَاقُفَانِ يُنْتِجُهُمَا غُلُوُّ الْهَمَّةِ

*Forbearance and deliberateness are the two traits that result from  
lofty aspiration  
(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 460)*

Some circumstances and states of human beings bring about other states. For example, ambition is one of the attributes and states of human beings which can be defined as: strong determination and motivation to attain a certain goal. When aspiration becomes firmly established and deeply entrenched, it totally transforms a person and brings about some very admirable qualities in him. It makes him energetic and strong. The people who gained exalted status and left their mark on this world all had great resolve and lofty aspirations. In their interaction with others, they had poise and grace and when they were accused of anything by the wicked people, they would ignore them as they deemed themselves to be above the actions of such lowly individuals. If they deemed it prudent, they would correct them slowly and gently, using wise means to silence them. It is obvious that all these positive traits complement each other and make a human being good. They are very effective in enabling him to attain his goals and in helping him progress towards his aspirations.

## JACK OF ALL TRADES

مَنْ أَوْمَأَ إِلَى مُتَفَاوِتٍ خَذَلَتْهُ الْحِيلُ

*One who seeks [to join] things that are dissimilar is left disappointed.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 403)*

With the intelligence, acumen and aptitude that a person has within him, he is able to undertake certain works and is capable of benefitting himself, his society and even humanity as a whole with his valuable service. Like the sun and moon give their light to the inhabitants of this earth, this individual's contributions can similarly be important and valuable for mankind. However, he must take his own ability and competence into consideration when selecting the task that he wishes to perform, to ensure that it is something suitable. He should have enough information about all the work he wishes to undertake and should be able to attend to all aspects of it. He should carry out all the work as it ought to be done otherwise, if he takes on many different tasks that are unrelated, and wants to handle all of them simultaneously such that he has full control over all of them, it will be impossible for him to give every task his full attention and carry on until its completion. Such a person, who ought to have used his time and strength to do the work that he is capable of performing in order to get a good outcome, ends up wasting his time and energy.

## REMEMBERING DEATH

نَفْسُ الْمَرْءِ خُطَاؤُهُ إِلَى أَجَلِهِ

*Each breath a person takes is a step closer to his death.*

*(Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying no. 74)*

In the beginning you are nothing and in the end you are nothing! The fate of all living things and the end of every creature is death. Yes, death is the bridge that everyone must cross and there are no exceptions for anyone (except God). How good it would be if people would regularly remember death. This would keep their arrogance and defiance at bay and would make them stop all their reckless and immoral behaviour. How good it would be if people knew that all their vain endeavours will run up to a dead end and all their efforts will come to naught. But alas, will greed and avarice let human beings look at anything other than the glitter of this world and allow them to look beyond the limits of the material realm? They never think about death or about the involuntary journey that every soul must undertake. Even when, at times, the name of death is mentioned, they forget it very quickly. It does not have any effect on them, and they soon turn their attention to the numerous other worldly concerns.

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